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The Possibility and Role of Supererogation in Protestant Ethics

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B.J. Condrey

Abstract

In 1958, J.O. Urmson's landmark article "Saints and Heroes" resulted in a renewed interest in supererogation in moral philosophy. However, religious engagement with supererogation has remained relatively low. Further complicating matters is the fact that dating back to the writings of Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon, and John Calvin, supererogatory deeds in the form of "counsels" were rejected due to the soteriological role they played in Aquinas' thought (and other Scholastics) which was used to justify the selling of indulgences by the Roman Catholic church. It is no wonder that the Reformers rejected supererogation in their aim to refute a view of justification that was not *sola gratia, sola fide* (at least from their perspective).

However, philosopher Gregory Mellema suggests that there is no contradiction in affirming a *sola gratia, sola fide* doctrine of justification while also affirming that a person can perform acts of supererogation. Employing the Protestant doctrine of vocation, he suggests that it might be possible in Protestant Christian ethics to perform an act of supererogation though the act in no way contributes to a person being justified before God (i.e., forgiven of sin and declared righteous in God's sight). This key insight opened the door to the possibility of supererogation in Protestant Christian ethics. Though Mellema's proposal is valuable, no specific act is named. In chapter three, I argue that there is one clear act of supererogation in the New Testament. Working with the two divorce passages in Matthew (5:31-32 and 19:1-9), I argue that the following act is supererogatory from a Protestant Christian perspective: choosing to remain married to a spouse that has committed adultery in an effort to reconcile and prevent divorce. This is not to say that this is the only one, but it serves as a great example and can be used to justify further inquiry into additional supererogatory deeds and the overall value of the concept in Protestant thought and practice.

In chapter four, I argue that proper motive should be considered an official criterion of supererogatory acts in Protestant Christian ethics. This view is contrary to David Heyd's and Alfred Archer's intent-based theories which, in line with John Stuart Mill, dismiss the deontic relevance of motives to acts. I argue against their view in an attempt to demonstrate that proper motive is necessary, along with the other three basic criteria (1. Not obligatory, 2. Not forbidden, 3. Possesses moral value), for an act to be classified as supererogatory in Protestant Christian ethics. My overall aim is to build upon Mellema's insight and offer a systematic account of supererogation in Protestant Christian ethics that is grounded in the New Testament.

Lay Summary

“Supererogation” is an awkward term but a useful concept. Essentially, it is an act that goes above and beyond the call of duty. If an act is supererogatory, then this means that though possessing moral worth, it is fully optional. If you do not do it, then no one can assign blame, yet the performance of such acts is considered praiseworthy. In this thesis, I argue that Protestants have rejected the possibility and role of such acts for far too long. From the time of the Reformation and the writings of Martin Luther and John Calvin, Protestants have rejected supererogation because this type of act was viewed as providing support for the selling of indulgences, which was closely connected with a faith+works view of justification that the Reformers wholeheartedly rejected in favor of a doctrine of justification is by faith alone.

However, Gregory Mellema argued in 1991 that there is nothing inherently wrong with affirming the following two propositions: (1) acts of supererogation are possible in Protestant ethics, and (2) these same acts can in no way justify a person. This key insight opened the door for Protestants to reengage with supererogation and ask the question: “Are supererogatory acts possible now that they have been decoupled from the doctrine of justification?” Building on this insight, I argue in chapter three that there is one clear example (this is not to say that there are not others) of supererogation in the New Testament: *an innocent spouse’s act of remaining and reconciling a marriage with a spouse who has committed adultery* (Matt. 5:31–32, 19:1–9). Based on Jesus’ teaching, the act is not obligatory, it is not forbidden, and it possesses moral worth. This act satisfies the three standard criteria for an act to be considered supererogatory.

I then conclude the thesis in chapter four by arguing that proper motive should be a fourth criterion for supererogation in Protestant ethics. This claim is somewhat unique because both David Heyd and Alfred Archer—two of the most well-known and established moral philosophers in the field—argue that proper intent, not motive, is required for an act to be supererogatory. Yet, the

emphasis in the New Testament is upon motive (e.g., fasting, praying, giving, preaching, etc.), so I argue for this while drawing on German theologian Helmut Thielicke's motive-centric account.

It is my hope that as a result of this thesis, Protestants will engage supererogation and embrace the concept as a useful tool in counseling contexts, biblical interpretation, and homiletics.

Acknowledgements

I am convinced that very few accomplishments, especially significant ones, are ever achieved alone. This doctorate is no exception. It is through the valuable contributions of certain people that this has been completed. I hope that they will also find great satisfaction in what I have written.

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pleasure and honor to learn from you, dialogue on various matters, bounce ideas off of you, and get your feedback. It was clear from day one that you really cared about my success.

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Lastly, I want to acknowledge and thank the Lord. I spent years praying for a season when I could “read, study, write, and teach.” This entire doctoral journey has been in answer to prayer and has resulted in an adventure for my entire family. My sole desire is that this project and all that results in the future will bring glory to you. May you be pleased.

For Allison, who made all of this possible.

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Introduction

The term “supererogation” is not a word that you come across on an everyday basis. In its simplest form, it is an act that possesses moral worth but is neither obligatory nor forbidden. Thus, it is completely optional. The concept remained largely unexamined until J.O. Urmson’s essay, “Saints and Heroes,” which was published in 1958. Though he only used the term “supererogatory” once in the entire essay,¹ his main purpose was to argue that an additional category of acts is necessary to classify the full range of acts that human beings perform. Urmson’s article generated a great deal of interest in supererogation and has in the words of David Heyd: “singlehandedly revived the idea of supererogation from its astonishingly long post-Reformation slumber.”² This led to the first *systematic* treatment of the idea of supererogation in the history of moral philosophy. Since then, a significant body of literature has emerged in an effort to not only debate the possibility of such acts within deontologically-oriented normative theories, but also to treat the more nuanced issues related to supererogation such as the relevance of character, the role of intentions and motives, whether an act can really possess moral worth but not be obligatory, whether “smaller” acts are candidates of supererogation, and several other important issues.

The main purpose of my thesis is to demonstrate the possibility, internal structure, and role of supererogatory acts in Protestant Christian ethics. The concept has been wrongly rejected for far too long by Protestant thinkers, which is unfortunate because for so many Christians, the concept may prove helpful in trying to make sense of their moral obligations in a morally complex

¹ James Urmson, “Saints and Heroes,” in *Essays in Moral Philosophy*, ed. A.I. Melden (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1958), 214. This is worth noting because Deborah Barnbaum writes that Urmson did not use the term “supererogation” in his article. She is mistaken, unless she is being overparticular and not counting the term “supererogatory” as an instance of “supererogation.” It is more likely that this is a simple oversight on her part. See Deborah R. Barnbaum, “Supererogation in Clinical Research,” *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* 11 (2008): 344.

² David Heyd, “Can Virtue Ethics Account for Supererogation?” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 77 (2015): 25.

world. I first became interested in supererogation while completing my undergraduate studies. As for most American students taking courses in philosophy, Peter Singer's 1972 article, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" was required reading. Having been raised in a middle-class family in a small rural town in Northeast Texas, I had never been exposed to philosophy, much less the ideas of Singer. As a result of his writings and additional research, I learned that 15,000–20,000 children under the age of five die every day from causes that are largely preventable by small donations from relatively affluent people in the West.³ As Singer notes, these causes have not always been easily preventable. It was not until the latter half of the 20th century and the rapid rise of "instant communication and swift transportation"⁴ that it became just as easy (if not easier) to help someone on the other side of the world as the neighbor next door. Because reputable humanitarian organizations are in a position to help, a person can in as little as five minutes save a person's life by donating via a smartphone. I became convinced that technological advances can alter the classification of an act in some circumstances. This is essentially the point that Singer makes when he writes: "the development of the world into a 'global village' has made an important, though still unrecognized, difference to our moral situation."⁵ Singer's piece was unsettling because I was forced—especially considering my personal faith in Jesus Christ and his command to love of neighbor—to rethink my understanding of "neighbor" and to consider adopting an "imaginative redefinition of neighbor" that included "more expansive, if not nonexistent, neighbor boundaries."⁶ Granted, I am not a utilitarian which obviously undergirds his more general approach to the issue

³ This number depends upon the source. In a relatively recent update, UNICEF reports the following: "In 2018 alone, roughly 15,000 under-five deaths occurred every day, an intolerably high number of largely preventable child deaths." See UNICEF, "Under-five mortality," accessed February 5th, 2020, <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-survival/under-five-mortality/>.

⁴ Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no. 3 (1972): 232.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁶ Thomas W. Walker, "Who is My Neighbor? An Invitation to See the World with Different Eyes," in *Global Neighbors: Christian Faith and Moral Obligation in Today's Economy*, ed. Douglas A. Hicks and Mark Valeri (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 12.

as well as his conclusion that one should give until they reach the “level of marginal utility.”⁷ But this aside, I became convinced that there may be an obligation of which I had previously remained ignorant.

In addition to reading Singer, another article by philosopher James Rachels was impactful. Though he writes on the distinction between active and passive euthanasia, he provides an example that I connected with Singer’s argument. Rachels writes:

Smith stands to gain a large inheritance if anything should happen to his six-year-old cousin. One evening while the child is taking his bath, Smith sneaks into the bathroom and drowns the child, and then arranges things so that it will look like an accident.

. . . Jones also stands to gain if anything should happen to his six-year-old cousin. Like Smith, Jones sneaks in planning to drown the child in his bath. However, just as enters the bathroom Jones sees the child slip and hit his head, and fall face down in the water. Jones is delighted; he stands by, ready to push the child’s head back under if it is necessary, but it is not necessary. With only a little thrashing about, the child drowns all by himself, “accidentally,” as Jones watches and does nothing.”⁸

After reading these two cases, I began to ask myself the question in relation to Singer’s article: “By not giving to charitable organizations that are in a position to save lives, am I morally responsible for at least some of the deaths that are occurring overseas from easily preventable causes?” In other words, is my “letting die” the same as killing them with my own two hands,⁹ and does God approve of my current life choices?

I later sat down with one of my professors while working on my Master’s and he introduced me to the term “supererogation.” Until that moment, I had never heard of the term nor was I familiar with the concept. I was intrigued to hear that there could be an act that while possessing moral worth, remains completely optional. Was giving aid to charitable organizations a duty? Was it an imperfect duty? Or was it an act of supererogation? Considering the number

⁷ Singer, “Famine,” 241.

⁸ James Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia,” *The New England Journal of Medicine* 292, no. 2 (1975): 79.

⁹ Singer elsewhere argues that there is not an intrinsic difference between “allowing someone to die” and “killing someone.” See Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 162.

of lives lost every day, I became convinced that charitable giving is part of my obedience to God and that the concept of supererogation might be extremely important for helping people—including myself—sort through at least some of the moral issues that we face in our global village.

Having become interested in supererogation, I discovered that the concept has a rich history in Christian thought and, as will be explained in chapter one, has been embraced by Roman Catholics but rejected by most Protestants. The Protestant rejection of such acts can be traced back to the writings of the Reformers. Key figures such as Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, and John Calvin adamantly opposed supererogatory deeds in the form of counsels because they were used by the Roman Catholic church to justify the selling of indulgences,¹⁰ which were based on the notion of a spiritual treasury from which merit could be added and subtracted, and a doctrine of justification that required deeds in addition to faith in Jesus Christ. Michael Horton writes that the Reformer's view of justification was that the righteousness of Christ is something that God "credits . . . through faith alone (*sola fide*), apart from works."¹¹ Because the Reformers recognized that counsels (i.e., supererogatory deeds) were closely connected with a doctrine of justification that is not *sola gratia and sola fide*, the Reformers rejected the possibility of such acts. As a result, there has been a low level of Protestant engagement with supererogation since the concept assumed a more prominent role in moral philosophy in the late 1950s. However, it would be inaccurate to claim there has not been religious engagement on other fronts.

Several philosophers in the late 1980s and early 1990s addressed the question of whether it is possible for God to supererogate. While interesting and valuable in its own right, this is not the focus of this thesis. Besides this group of philosophers, Mark Wynn has also written about supererogation. Like myself, he is interested in acts of supererogation performed by human beings rather than by God. However, he writes from a Roman Catholic perspective,

¹⁰ Joachim Hruschka, "Supererogation and Meritorious Duties," *Annual Review of Law and Ethics* 6 (1998): 96.

¹¹ Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 282.

and for this reason, the relevance of his work to what I am doing is indirect. The concept and history of supererogation is discussed in more detail in chapter one. Another figure who has engaged supererogation from a religious perspective is Gregory Mellema. Mellema's contributions are pivotal to my thesis, and in some sense, my entire thesis hinges upon one particular insight that he offers in his book, *Beyond the Call of Duty: Supererogation, Obligation, and Offence*. As will be discussed in detail in chapter one, he argues that there is nothing contradictory about asserting that acts of supererogation are possible while still holding to the belief that such acts can in no way justify a person (i.e., result in God forgiving them and imputing his righteousness to them).¹² This is key, because it opens the door for acts of supererogation in Protestant ethics without challenging the Protestant doctrine of justification. Mellema then proceeds to argue that there may be a way to satisfy both Protestants who accept the possibility of supererogation (i.e., "theistic supererogationists") and Protestants who do not (i.e., "theistic anti-supererogationists") by invoking the concept of vocation. This will be discussed in the second half of chapter two. Lastly, John and Paul Feinberg assume acts of supererogation are possible in Protestant ethics (which is quite an assumption) and mention three that they believe are supererogatory. However, supererogation is not their main focus and their remarks are brief and do not occur within a larger, more systematic treatment of supererogation in Protestant thought. So while Mellema's vocation-based theory of supererogation in Protestant thought is extremely valuable and the Feinbergs' examples are worth considering, it is my goal to demonstrate that there is at least one act of supererogation in the New Testament in an effort to provide a systematic account of supererogation. If this can be shown, then it will open the door to further reflection concerning the possibility of additional acts and the importance of supererogation in both theory and practice.

In chapter one, I provide an extensive (though obviously not comprehensive) survey of the history of supererogation in Roman Catholic

¹² Gregory Mellema, *Beyond the Call of Duty: Supererogation, Obligation, and Offense* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 52.

thought, Protestant thought, and moral philosophy. Attention is given to explaining Urmson's view of supererogation and the examples he used. Chapter one concludes with a survey of some of the more central ideas and arguments found throughout the literature for and against supererogation. Considering the focus of this thesis, the final subsection in chapter one, titled "Supererogation and Christianity," is of particular relevance for laying the groundwork for what follows.

In chapter two, I argue that the theological context must be considered when attempting to classify an act from a religious perspective. This point may seem obvious, but Urmson's treatment of Francis' *preaching to the birds* suggests otherwise. In the first half of the chapter, I argue that Urmson misclassified Francis' *preaching to the birds*. It would have been better if Urmson had not included this example. Unlike the two other examples of supererogation that he uses in his argument, the Francis example is more complicated because it is religious. Ultimately, Urmson fails to consider the background theological beliefs which inform Francis' act. This oversight results in Urmson not having the necessary conceptual tools to properly classify Francis' act. This is an important point because it shows that while there are some similarities between discussions of supererogation in secular and religious ethics, there are also differences. Mark Wynn makes this point abundantly clear, using the concept of supererogation to "map the relationship between religious and secular thought."¹³ He argues that the "introduction of a theological context" can change the classification of an act in some situations.¹⁴ In doing so, another point is implicitly reinforced: supererogation in secular ethics and in Christian ethics shares at least some similarities. There is shared "territory" around the concept of supererogation, and this is valuable because it fosters communication, the sharing of ideas, and the possibility that

¹³ Mark Wynn, "Supererogation and the Relationship Between Religious and Secular Ethics: Some Perspectives Drawn from Thomas Aquinas and John of the Cross," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement 77* (2015): 163.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 166.

supererogation can help the two sides better understand one another as well as benefit from the exchange.

Chapter two concludes with a discussion of Mellema's suggestion that acts of supererogation might be possible in Protestant ethics if we consider the doctrine of vocation. By referring to the Protestant doctrine of vocation, Mellema—unlike Urmson—rightfully takes the theological context into consideration when attempting to answer the question: “Are acts of supererogation possible in Protestant ethics?”¹⁵ After presenting Mellema's view, the Feinbergs' three examples of supererogatory acts are discussed next. As valuable as these contributions are, my account in chapter three is unique because the act that I argue is supererogatory in Protestant ethics is located in the Gospel of Matthew; it is taken directly from the Bible, and for this reason is presumed to be authoritative to some degree. The focus on one act should not be interpreted as an argument that there is only one act of supererogation in the New Testament. Rather, it is meant to serve as a catalyst for further inquiry into whether other acts of supererogation exist in Protestant Christian ethics and ultimately, why this is important.

In chapter three, I argue that the act of an innocent spouse of remaining and reconciling with their spouse who has committed adultery is an act of supererogation. My argument is based on the words of Jesus concerning divorce in Matthew's Gospel.¹⁶ Of course, several theological commitments are required in order to begin the argument, so these are briefly enumerated and explained. Before presenting the argument, I discuss Philip Melancthon's view on celibacy because he, unlike the other reformers, affirms that celibacy is a counsel. However, I argue that his understanding of a counsel and Aquinas' understanding of a counsel are very different. Considering Melancthon's doctrine of justification, it is clear that he did not think that the counsel of celibacy could earn extra merit that could then help a person secure eternal blessing in a more efficient manner. This alone clearly separates

¹⁵ To clarify, Urmson is not concerned with whether acts of supererogation are possible in Protestant ethics. This is the specific question that concerns Mellema.

¹⁶ Matt. 5:31–32 and 19:1–9.

Aquinas' and Melanchthon's view of a counsel. Yet, Melanchthon is interesting because his view of the counsel of celibacy is similar to how an act of supererogation is viewed in moral philosophy. Thus, I argue that in an indirect fashion, Melanchthon—like Mellema—is an example of a Protestant thinker who affirms the possibility of supererogatory acts. However, I go on to suggest that there is good reason for Protestants to reject the idea that celibacy is supererogatory. While this is at odds with Melanchthon's view in *Loci Communes 1521*, the more important point remains: *Melanchthon affirms—albeit indirectly—a type of act that closely resembles supererogation*. This provides precedent for my overall project.

The second part of chapter three is where I argue that the act of an innocent spouse of remaining and reconciling with their spouse who has committed adultery is an act of supererogation. Needless to say, the guilty spouse must repent and also desire marital reconciliation or else the opportunity for the innocent spouse to reconcile the marriage does not present. First, I argue that the innocent spouse's act is not obligatory, which is the first criterion of supererogation. *Prima facie*, this seems clear: however, David Instone-Brewer argues that Jesus not only commands the innocent spouse to forgive the adulterous spouse, but also to reconcile if the guilty spouse is willing.¹⁷ Drawing on biblical scholars, I argue that there are good reasons for rejecting this view, not least of which is the fact that marital reconciliation can be extremely oppressive for the victimized spouse. Considering Jesus' emphasis upon compassion and his eagerness to help those who have been victimized and marginalized in one way or another, Instone-Brewer's interpretation of this passage seems out-of-character with the larger ethos of Jesus' life, teaching, and ministry. In arguing against Instone-Brewer's thesis, I attempt to show that the social act of "marital reconciliation" is not implicit in the psychological act of "forgiving" in Jesus' teaching. Thus, the innocent spouse has the compassionate, divine permission to not reconcile the marriage if they do not feel that they are able.

¹⁷ David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 146.

The next step in showing that the act of remaining and reconciling is supererogatory is to show that it is not forbidden, which is the second criterion of supererogation. As one scholar notes, both Jewish and Roman law required a man to divorce a spouse that had committed adultery in Jesus' day.¹⁸ From a Jewish perspective, this was due in part to the Pharisee's interpretation of Moses' remarks on divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1–4. As evidenced by the Pharisees' words, "Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?",¹⁹ there was a prevalent belief that adultery necessitated divorce. Drawing out the implications of Jesus' response that Moses "allowed" rather than "commanded" divorce, I argue that there are strong reasons for believing that Jesus does not require the innocent spouse to divorce, which means that the act in question is not forbidden.

The last step in showing that the act in question is supererogatory is to show that it possesses moral worth. Though this is obvious and requires little defense, attention is given to four distinct ways that the act possesses moral value from a Christian perspective. They are as follows: (a) an instance of God's forgiveness, (b) holiness-producing, (c) evangelistic, and (d) beneficial for children. Following this discussion, two distinct but related questions are addressed in relation to supererogation: (1) In the case that the innocent spouse wants to remain and reconcile, is the *guilty* spouse's act to reconcile the marriage also supererogatory? and (2) In the case of double-adultery, does the classificatory status of the act of reconciling the marriage change? The distinctive feature of the latter situation is that both spouses—as opposed to one—are guilty of adultery.

Having argued that there is at least one clear act of supererogation in the New Testament, I focus on motives in chapter four. Though Urmson did not give any attention to intentions and motives, this is one of the most important topics in the literature. For Urmson, an act is supererogatory if it satisfies the following criteria: (1) not obligatory, (2) not forbidden, and (3)

¹⁸ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 467.

¹⁹ Matt. 19:7.

possesses moral worth. However, several moral philosophers have argued that this account is incomplete and needs to be adapted to make room for a fourth criterion which is rooted in the psychology of the agent. According to David Heyd and more recently Alfred Archer, for the act of a moral agent to be supererogatory he or she must act with proper intent in addition to satisfying the three basic criteria. Granted, they disagree over the nature of the intent, and this is discussed in detail in chapter four. Yet, they concur at a general level. However, others like Phillip Montague argue that proper motive is essential to an act being classified as supererogatory. The basic idea is that intuitively, there seems to be something wrong with the proposition: “A selfish act can be supererogatory.” Though Heyd and Archer do not have an issue with selfish motives since they believe that proper intention, not proper motive, is a criterion of supererogation, I argue otherwise. Motive occupies an important place in the New Testament and can be shown to affect the deontic status of an act. Ultimately, this entails that in Protestant ethics, a behavior that is performed chiefly for selfish reasons cannot not be considered a candidate for supererogation.

In arguing for the role of motive in a Protestant account of supererogation, I rely heavily on Helmut Thielicke’s motive-based account of assessing the moral worth of acts in conjunction with Steven Sverdlik’s discussion of how motives can have deontic relevance.²⁰ Considering that this places me at odds with David Heyd and Alfred Archer—two of the more prominent thinkers in the field of supererogation—it is incumbent on me that I defend my account against their views. Since both of their views can ultimately be traced back to John Stuart Mill’s view of motives and intentions in chapter two of *Utilitarianism*, I spend considerable time addressing Mill’s view as it relates to the topic. I then discuss the act of supererogation in chapter three in view of my argument in chapter four that proper motive is also necessary for an act to be classified as supererogatory in Protestant ethics. Chapter four

²⁰ Steven Sverdlik, *Motive and Rightness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4, 15.

concludes with a few final remarks concerning the indirect—as opposed to direct—relevance of character to acts of supererogation.

There is another way in which my thesis makes a significant contribution in relation to the debate over intentions and motives. I offer a thorough discussion of the distinction between intention and motive which is often absent in the literature about supererogation. As will be discussed in chapter one, some thinkers conflate the terms, using them synonymously. Other thinkers seem to assume that the definition for each must be self-evident and therefore needs no attention. Due to this widespread neglect, ample space is given to defining the terms so that my argument for motive is presented as clearly as possible. This section might also prove useful for anyone reading or writing in the field of supererogation because few tasks are more important—no matter the discipline—than defining the key terms. In the social sciences, such definitions are called “operational definitions,” and provide an objective, measurable definition so that different researchers at different places and at different times can replicate the studies.²¹

The concept of supererogation can be helpful in counseling, homiletics, and even biblical interpretation. Concerning the latter, this will be evident in chapter three and will be further discussed in the conclusion. Not only this, but space for supererogation in any moral theory has an aesthetic-moral value because it prevents human beings from being “slaves” to every opportunity where the possibility of performing a good act presents. Unlike what is implicit in the views of both John Wesley²² and Joseph Allen,²³ supererogation is an implicit endorsement of limited responsibility. In other words, there are times when a person does not have to perform a good deed even though the opportunity presents. According to Gilbert Meilander, this frees a person from

²¹ The American Psychological Association (APA) defines an “operational definition” as a “description of something in terms of the operations (procedures, actions, or processes) by which it could be observed and measured.” See APA Dictionary of Psychology, s.v. “operational definition,” American Psychological Association, accessed February 6, 2020, <https://dictionary.apa.org/operational-definition>.

²² John Wesley, *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, in *Entire Sanctification Attainable in This Life* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1898), 112–113.

²³ Joseph Allen, *Love & Conflict: A Covenantal Model of Christian Ethics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1995), 79, 82, 97, 126–127.

the “tyranny which requires that we be something more than finite beings,”²⁴ an accusation he directs toward consequentialist moral theories. At the root of such “tyrannical” normative theories that do not permit a person to forego the performance of a good deed when it is in their power to do so is: (1) a failure to recognize that we are “created by God to inhabit a particular location in nature and history,”²⁵ and (2) a failure to “trust in God’s providential care” in “every circumstance of life.”²⁶ Ultimately, Protestant Christian ethics is made more beautiful and lives of Christian disciples are immensely enriched by the inclusion of supererogation. Though reference to beauty is not an argument for supererogation in-and-of itself per se, it speaks volumes as to the value of the argument set forth in this thesis.

²⁴ Gilbert Meilaender, *Faith and Faithfulness: Basic Themes in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 108.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 99, 108.

§ 1. Supererogation – A Review of the Literature

My goal in this chapter is to introduce the concept of supererogation in moral philosophy and Christian thought. The chapter is divided into the following three sections, which are then followed by a brief summary: (I) A brief summary of the nature of supererogation; (II) James Urmsón's original argument; and (III) a survey of the central ideas and arguments found in the literature for and against supererogation. The third section is the longest, being divided into four subsections that allow for a detailed and systematic treatment of some of the most important ideas and arguments associated with both the supererogationist and anti-supererogationist positions. The four subsections are as follows: (1) *Elizabeth Pybus' Anti-Supererogation Argument and the Paradox of Supererogation*; (2) *The Broader View of Supererogation*; (3) *Acts, Dispositions, Motives, and Intentions*; and (4) *Supererogation and Christianity*. The treatment of these topics will lay the groundwork for the discussion that follows in chapters two, three, and four. Before the first major section, I want to mention how the concept of supererogation has once again become a topic of interest among moral philosophers and a few Christian philosophers and ethicists.

In 1958, J.O. Urmsón wrote that the threefold classificatory scheme for assessing the moral status of human acts was "totally inadequate to the facts of morality."¹ He claimed that throughout the history of philosophy, moral philosophers had, either explicitly or implicitly, assumed only three types of acts from the perspective of moral worth: *duties*, *permissible acts*, and *wrong acts*:

- i) *Duties* are typically viewed as acts which we ought to perform, the omission of which is considered morally wrong. For Urmsón, two quintessential examples of "rock-bottom duties" are telling the truth and keeping one's promises.² Essentially, if an act is classified as a *duty*,

¹ Urmsón, "Saints and Heroes," 198–199.

² *Ibid.*, 204.

the moral agent is required to act in such a manner that the corresponding obligation is discharged.

ii) *Permissible* acts are acts that are indifferent from a moral perspective. While rushing into a burning building to save a stranger's child is no doubt of significant moral value, the color socks that you wear while doing so does not matter from a moral standpoint.³

iii) *Wrong* acts stand in symmetrical relation with duties in that they possess the exact opposite properties as duties. Whereas one ought to perform a duty and is wrong for not doing so, one is required not to perform a morally wrong act and is wrong for doing so. For Immanuel Kant, *lying* is an example of a moral wrong because it can *never* be justified.⁴

For Urmson, this tripartite deontic classificatory scheme was deficient and needed immediate revision. Though he only used the term "supererogatory" once in his essay,⁵ he clearly advocated for the fourth category of *supererogation* that could accommodate those acts that "are certainly of moral worth but that fall all outside the notion of a duty and seem to go beyond it . . ." ⁶ Supererogation in its most colloquial sense refers to "doing more than you had to."⁷

It is safe to say that though there is significant disagreement regarding the possibility of supererogation within moral philosophy as well as different branches of the Christian church, "common discourse in most cultures allows for such acts and often attaches special value to them."⁸ Implicit in such utterances as "You didn't have to do that," or "That is more than generous," is an underlying belief in the ability to supererogate. Michael Zimmerman writes

³ Paul McNamara, "Making Room for Going Beyond the Call," *Mind* 105 (1996): 420.

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* 4:402–4:403, trans. Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 17–18.

⁵ Urmson, "Saints and Heroes," 214.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁷ McNamara, "Making Room," 417; A.C. McKay mentions a similar phrase: "doing more than is required by duty." See A.C. McKay, "Supererogation and the Profession of Medicine," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 28 (2002): 70.

⁸ Heyd, "Supererogation."

that when inquiring into the nature of supererogation, there are four questions that must be kept in mind. They are as follows: “What is the nature of supererogation? Are supererogatory acts possible? Do they actually occur? Are those acts that we commonly call supererogatory in fact supererogatory?”⁹ Generally speaking, these four questions have been the major concern of moral philosophers. The order with which Zimmerman lists the questions is not accidental. Rather, it is inherently logical. Although the second question, “Are supererogatory acts possible?” tends to get the most attention, you cannot effectively deal with this question until you have at least a working definition of supererogation itself (Zimmerman’s first question). The adjective “working” is here employed to acknowledge the fact that “there is no ordinary use of this term [supererogation] to guide us, and its use among philosophers is hardly uniform.”¹⁰ However, Gregory Mellema is not so skeptical and rightly affirms that there does “appear to be reasonable agreement” about what constitutes a supererogatory act.¹¹ Returning to Zimmerman’s questions, even if you answer the second question in the affirmative, this does not necessarily entail that such an act has ever been or could be executed (Zimmerman’s third question). What is true in theory might not be realizable in practice. This might suggest that the concept itself—although interesting—is in the end, useless. I do not deal with this issue in this thesis, but rather, assume from the outset that if it can be shown that there are supererogatory deeds in Protestant Christian thought, then they are realizable in practice as well.

A Brief Summary of the Nature of Supererogation

As stated above, Urmson argues that the threefold classificatory scheme embraced by moral philosophers to categorize acts is inadequate. In Patricia McGoldrick’s words, “Urmson tells us [of] the need for a new

⁹ Michael Zimmerman, "Supererogation and Doing the Best One Can," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30 (1993): 373.

¹⁰ McNamara, "Making Room," 416.

¹¹ Gregory Mellema, "Quasi-Supererogation," *Philosophical Studies* 52 (1987): 141.

taxonomy, a four-fold classification of the moral realm, which recognizes the existence of acts which attract more praise but do not require emulation.”¹² In addition to duties (morally required), permissible acts, and acts that are wrong (morally forbidden), the fourth category of *supererogation* was introduced in an effort to better account for the full range of act types. Simply stated, the threefold deontic categorization of acts was not conceptually rich enough to capture the complexity of our moral experience. In an interesting and bold intellectual move, David Heyd takes things one step farther. As a proponent of supererogation, he writes, “Indeed, the way a theory treats the problem of supererogation and whether it can be adjusted to contain it serve as a criteria for its adequacy.”¹³ Rather than subjecting supererogation to the test of whether it can be accommodated by one of the major ethical theories in the past,¹⁴ he suggests that it is the validity of the ethical theory itself that should be tested depending upon the degree to which the theory can accommodate (or be adjusted to accommodate) supererogation.

Before providing a working definition of supererogation, it is important to mention for clarity’s sake that “judgments of supererogation are *act* assessments.”¹⁵ An individual or a particular virtue is not labeled *supererogatory*. For this reason, the question of supererogation has traditionally been analyzed from a deontic perspective, as deontological theories are act-centered rather than agent-centered. That being said, one of the more interesting developments in the literature is whether the “motive” or “intent” of the agent should serve as an additional criterion of supererogation. This topic will be discussed in great detail in the third section of this chapter and addressed extensively from a Protestant viewpoint in chapter four.

¹² Patricia McGoldrick, “Saints and Heroes: A Plea for the Supererogatory,” *Philosophy* 59 (1984): 523.

¹³ Heyd, *Supererogation*, 10.

¹⁴ The theories that he mentions are Christianity, Aristotelianism, Kantianism, utilitarianism, and contract theory.

¹⁵ Phillip Montague, “Acts, Agents, and Supererogation,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 26 (1989): 102.

Philip Montague provides a succinct summary of supererogation. He writes, “actions are supererogatory if and only if they are neither morally required (obligatory, and so on) nor morally prohibited (wrong, and so on), but nevertheless have moral value (are morally good, and so on).”¹⁶ The last distinction is important because it serves to delineate two types of permissible acts: a *permissible* act of moral value (i.e. supererogation) and an act that is “permissible in the neutral sense.” As expressed by Paul McNamara, “Morality shrugs at what is indifferent. But as supererogation makes clear, morality needn’t shrug at what is optional.”¹⁷ It is vitally important to elaborate upon the *optional* feature of an act of supererogation just mentioned. It is not enough to say that a particular act is “optional.” Zimmerman writes: “supererogatory acts are not just optional, but fully optional. An act is fully optional only if it is not just not obligatory but also such that its performance does not constitute a way to fulfill some obligation; it is, as it were, wholly beyond the reaches of obligation.”¹⁸ Of course, his claim that performing an act of supererogation “does not constitute a way to fulfill some obligation” is at best contentious and at worst, wrong.

Regarding the distinction between “optional” and “fully optional,” one only has to think of Kant’s conception of an *imperfect* duty as it is traditionally understood to see the value of such a point. According to Kant, our ability to reason is fundamental to the moral life. Because rationality is shared by all human beings, that which reason reveals in the moral sphere is thought to be universal and thus binding upon all agents. He concludes that reason ultimately leads to the categorical imperative—“the ultimate moral norm”¹⁹—from which we can deduce all other particular duties in the form of maxims. The first and most important formulation of the categorical imperative is, “Act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that

¹⁶ Ibid., 102.

¹⁷ McNamara, "Making Room," 420.

¹⁸ Zimmerman, "Supererogation," 373.

¹⁹ Roger J. Sullivan, *An Introduction to Kant's Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 29.

it become a universal law.”²⁰ After stating this foundational moral principle that reason provides, Kant provides four detailed examples. Using these, he draws the all-important distinction between perfect and imperfect duties. According to Kant, a *perfect* duty “allows of no exception to the advantage of inclination”²¹ while an *imperfect* duty does not “specify precisely in what way one is to act and how much one is to do by the action.”²² Whereas one is bound by a perfect duty to never lie, one has a significant amount of “playroom (*latitudo*)”²³ in deciding for oneself how to go about fulfilling an imperfect duty such as *beneficence*. Robert Johnson and Adam Cureton write: “In Kant’s framework, duties of right are narrow and perfect because they require or forbid particular acts, while duties of ethics and virtue are wide and imperfect because they allow significant latitude in how we may decide to fulfill them.”²⁴ Though there is a significant level of indeterminacy inherent in how to fulfill an imperfect duty, it must still be fulfilled. How and when one fulfills an imperfect duty is optional, but one must in the end fulfill the imperfect duty in one way or another. On the other hand, a person can forever refrain from performing an act of supererogation without ever committing a moral wrong. In other words, a supererogatory act is *fully optional*. Due to this property of supererogation, moral agents are often praised for performing such deeds. Needless to say, the distinction between *optional* and *fully optional* is significant in drawing classificatory lines in the sand.

Before transitioning to James Urmson’s influential argument for supererogation, one caveat is in order regarding Kant’s imperfect duty. Unlike John Stuart Mill’s clear characterization of an imperfect duty, there is a level of ambiguity in Kant’s depiction that has not gone unnoticed. In what I am referring to as the alternative view of Kant’s imperfect duty, Michael Clark

²⁰ Kant, *Groundwork*, 34.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

²² Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 521.

²³ *Ibid.*, 521.

²⁴ Heyd, “Supererogation.”

writes, “Sometimes Kant seems to write of imperfect duties as if they were supererogatory.”²⁵ He then paraphrases the following passage from Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals* in support of the claim: “Imperfect duties alone are, accordingly, *duties of virtue*. Fulfillment of them is *merit (meritum)* = a+; but failure to fulfill them is not in itself *culpability (demeritum)* = -a) but rather mere deficiency in moral worth = 0, unless the subject should make it his principle not to comply with such duties.”²⁶ The interesting part of this statement is where Kant states that a person does not necessarily deserve blame for failing to fulfill an imperfect duty. Regarding the phrase, “deficiency in moral worth,” Kant explains that a person’s failure to perform an imperfect duty may stem from a “want of virtue, lack of moral strength” as opposed to *vice*. In these type cases, the agent appears to have lacked the specific virtue that would have provided the impetus to perform the particular act that would have discharged the imperfect duty. So for Kant, although the individual lacks moral strength and has committed a “transgression,” so long as the person did not do so intentionally (i.e., out of principle), the failure is not attributable to any vice. It might just be the case that the individual needs to mature, grow in their resolve to do the right thing, and develop the appropriate virtue that would propel them to fulfill the imperfect duty the next time a similar opportunity presents itself.

Although the alternative view of Kant’s imperfect duty has merit, it does not represent the mainstream view within the body of literature on supererogation. For example, as recently as 2015, Marcia Baron has argued that although “Kant does have a place for what we often classify as supererogatory acts . . . [he] does not have a place for the classification.”²⁷ She argues that the category of imperfect duties in Kant’s theory can do a more than adequate job accounting for acts that are typically thought to require supererogation. It is clear that Baron endorses the mainstream view of Kant’s

²⁵ Michael Clark, “The Meritorious and the Mandatory,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 79 (1978–1979): 25.

²⁶ Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 521.

²⁷ Marcia Baron, “A Kantian Take on the Supererogatory,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 33 (2016): 347.

imperfect duty. This is best showcased in her statement, “Lending a helping hand may not be morally required here and now, but there is no moral option of never lending a helping hand.”²⁸ The point is that she endorses the mainstream view of Kant’s imperfect duty. From this mainstream perspective, the *optional* nature of an imperfect duty versus the *fully optional* nature of supererogation is key to distinguishing the two. Although exact definitions may vary, most agree that an act of supererogation is an act that possesses moral worth (i.e., is not merely permissible) and is neither obligatory nor forbidden.

James Urmson’s Original Argument

Urmson begins his argument for supererogation with the observation that we sometimes use the words “saint/hero” as a favorable moral evaluation of an agent and the words “saintly/heroic” as a favorable moral evaluation of acts. He then proceeds to articulate three types of situations in which we employ these terms. For the sake of brevity, I will focus on the “saintly/heroic” assessment of acts because it is clearly his main focus throughout the essay.

In the first type of situation, an act is “saintly” if an individual does his duty “by virtue of self-control” when most would not, due to “inclination or self-interest.”²⁹ In similar fashion, an act is “heroic” if an individual does his duty “by virtue of self-control” when most would not due to “fear or a drive for self-preservation.”³⁰ In this first type of situation, what both have in common is that the agent performs his duty when most others would not due to a high level of self-control. The individual may experience the same level of temptation to forego their duty as the next person, yet they exercise a good deal of restraint to do what morality requires in that moment no matter what they might be feeling. In some sense, there is a marked incongruity between the internal state of the agent and the external act itself. Although the moral agent deserves praise, it is important to note that in the end, the individual did not do

²⁸ Ibid., 353.

²⁹ Urmson, “Saints and Heroes,” 200.

³⁰ Ibid., 200.

more than was required. Therefore, this first type of situation in which an act is labeled “saintly” or “heroic” can still be accommodated within the threefold classificatory scheme that Urmson is attacking.

The second type of situation in which an act can be labeled as “saintly” or “heroic” is similar to the first except for the ease with which the act is performed. In the first type of situation, the moral agent had to grit their teeth, wage an internal war against all that they felt, and perform the right act even though they were experiencing the same inner struggle as the next person. You might say that they did their duty in spite of what they felt. However, in this second type of situation, an act is called “saintly” or “heroic” because an individual performs their duty “without effort.” Whereas in the first type of situation a person does their duty in the face of contrary impulses, emotions, and tendencies, in this second case the deed *flows from the heart*. Self-control is not needed. The agent is of such moral excellence that there is no internal antagonist standing in the way of the dutiful course of action. Urmson writes, “Here we have the conspicuously virtuous deed, in the Aristotelian sense.”³¹ Though the performance of a “saintly” or “heroic” deed in Urmson’s second sense is quite extraordinary, the act still falls under the concept of duty. Urmson wrote of these first two types of situations, “Roughly, we are calling a person saintly or heroic because he does his duty in such difficult contexts that most men would fail in them.”³² However, it is in the third type of situation that the terms “saintly” and “heroic” are used to describe an act that cannot be subsumed under the threefold classification. For obvious reasons, this third type of situation is of the greatest relevance for Urmson. In this third type of situation, an act is called “saintly” or “heroic” because it is “far beyond the limits of [a person’s] duty.”³³ In support of this claim, Urmson provided several examples, two of which I will discuss now.

His first example of a “saintly” or “heroic” act that goes far beyond the limits of duty is the case of the doctor. Urmson writes:

³¹ Ibid., 201.

³² Ibid., 201.

³³ Ibid., 201.

We have considered the, certainly, heroic action of the doctor who does his duty by sticking to his patients in a plague-stricken city; we have now to consider the case of the doctor who, no differently situated from countless other doctors in other places, volunteers to join the depleted medical forces in that city.”³⁴

According to Urmson, this “self-effacing life in the service of others would not even be contemplated by the majority of upright, kind, and honest men, let alone expected of them.”³⁵ In supererogatory language, the act can be characterized as possessing moral worth while being neither morally required nor morally prohibited.

Urmson’s second example of supererogatory behavior is famous. He writes: “We may imagine a squad of soldiers to be practicing the throwing of live hand grenades; a grenade slips from the hand of one of them and rolls on the ground near the squad; one of them sacrifices his life by throwing himself on the grenade and protecting his comrades with his own body.”³⁶ In order to further distinguish this act, Urmson asks the reader to pretend that the soldier has just recently joined the squad and for this reason cannot be said to have been motivated by any emotion that might have arisen from that of friendship.³⁷ Urmson argues that this is a clear case of supererogation for the following reasons: (1) the act clearly possesses moral worth; (2) if the soldier had not thrown himself on the grenade, no one would dare say that he had failed to perform his moral duty; (3) if the soldier had not thrown himself on the grenade, no one would dare say that he *ought* to have done so; and last, (4) no one thinks that his fellow comrades were morally wrong for not attempting to throw themselves on the grenade.³⁸ For these reasons, the soldier’s act cannot be classified as a duty. However, under a threefold classificatory scheme, all that remains is to classify the soldier’s act as either a permissible deed having no

³⁴ Ibid., 201–202.

³⁵ Ibid., 202.

³⁶ Ibid., 202.

³⁷ Interestingly, this qualification suggests that Urmson might not have been so fast to classify this self-sacrificing deed as supererogatory if in fact the soldier had a best friend in the squad.

³⁸ Ibid., 202–203.

moral value or a morally wrong act. For Urmson, both options are clearly wrong. Therefore, a fourth category is needed in order to capture this act and others like it.

Following this point, Urmson proceeds to defend his claim against the argument, "If the act of the soldier presented itself to the soldier as a *duty*, then he was obligated to perform the deed. Therefore, it would have been morally wrong to omit the act." But there is a difference between *subjective perception* and what is *objectively* the case. Urmson writes, "Subjectively, we may say, at the time of the act, the deed presented itself as a duty, but it was not a duty."³⁹ Although the soldier may have *believed* that this act was in fact a duty, that does not mean that it was necessarily so. In other words, it is possible for even the best of moral agents to get it wrong sometimes. The willingness to behave in a morally exemplary manner and the philosophical ability to rightly classify an act are not one and the same. A moral philosopher who exhibits a keen ability to classify acts might be cowardly while an ordinary citizen who knows nothing of deontic classifications may possess great courage. The point is that while a saint or hero might believe their act to be supererogatory, it does not mean that they are correct. After all, the willingness to perform such a deed does not necessarily translate into having an acute, philosophical skill in classifying deeds. The opposite is true as well: a person trained in analytic moral philosophy might be concerned only with classifying, not performing, acts of supererogation. Most of us would prefer to have the former, not the latter, in our circle of friends, but this is another matter altogether. The simple point that needs emphasizing is that subjective reports regarding the status of a performed act must be treated with care because in most cases, self-reports are coming from those who have performed the deed.

In an effort to present a succinct summary of Urmson's view of supererogation, much as been omitted. However, there is one additional component of his view that needs mentioning. Urmson did not believe that the supererogatory classification was exclusively reserved for only those deeds

³⁹ Ibid., 203.

which could rightly be labeled “saintly/heroic” in the third sense. While he believed that acts of this sort represented the most conspicuous examples of supererogation, he also writes, “It is possible to go just beyond one’s duty by being a little more generous, forbearing, helpful, or forgiving than fair dealing demands.”⁴⁰ Quite often, these “minor” cases of supererogation are thought to be just that (i.e. minor) because they typically are too modest in terms of sacrifice to deserve the saintly or heroic label.⁴¹ These could be “small favors and acts of courtesy that ordinary men [and women] go out of their way to perform.”⁴² Joel Feinberg writes, “It may be nice to do favors for people; but a favor, by definition, is nothing that we are legally or morally *required* to do.”⁴³ These “smaller” acts of supererogation will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. The bottom line is that for Urmson, there is a wide range of acts that cannot be accounted for within the traditional tripartite classificatory scheme. Therefore, a fourth category is needed. Since his time, many more philosophers have turned their attention to supererogation. In the following section, I will provide a brief summary of the principal arguments for and against supererogation.

Arguments For and Against Supererogation

I will present several arguments and counterarguments for and against supererogation in this section. I have restricted the scope of this section to arguments that satisfy the following criteria: (1) they are prominent in the literature; (2) they raise and/or address important concepts and issues that are central in the supererogatory debate; (3) they are not excessively technical; and (4) they are relevant to the thesis. With this in mind, I will discuss the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 205; Barry Curtis provides a nice summary of this aspect of Urmson’s thought. See Barry Curtis, “The Supererogatory, the Foolish and the Morally Required,” *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 15 (1981): 315.

⁴¹ Clark, “The Meritorious,” 30.

⁴² Roderick M. Chisholm and Ernest Sosa, “Intrinsic Preferability and the Problem of Supererogation,” *Synthese* 16 (1966): 326.

⁴³ Joel Feinberg, “Supererogation and Rules,” *Ethics* 71 (1961): 277.

following in the remainder of this chapter: (1) *Elizabeth Pybus' Anti-Supererogation Argument and the Paradox of Supererogation*; (2) *The Broader View of Supererogation*; (3) *Acts, Dispositions, Motives, and Intentions*; and (4) *Supererogation and Christianity*.

Elizabeth Pybus' Anti-Supererogation Argument and the Paradox of Supererogation

The notion that acts of supererogation are possible gives rise to an interesting moral dilemma. Michael Clark clearly expresses this moral dilemma when he writes, "How is it possible that there should be acts which are meritorious from a moral point of view but which are nevertheless not morally required of us?"⁴⁴ In other words, if the performance of an act is thought to be praiseworthy from a moral perspective, then what gives an agent the moral permission to *not* perform such an act? This "conceptual tension regarding supererogation"⁴⁵ is known as the *paradox of supererogation* and "arises out of the idea that it can never be permissible to do something morally inferior to another available option, yet acts of supererogation seem to presuppose this."⁴⁶ The connection between what is morally good and obligation is what Horgan and Timmons label the "good-ought tie-up," which refers to the idea that the "moral goodness of [an] action allegedly entails obligation."⁴⁷ Normative theories that are characterized by the "good-ought tie-up" are what Claire Benn refers to as "maximizing theories."⁴⁸ The idea that an act can be morally good but not obligatory is what leads James Dreier to write of

⁴⁴ Clark, "The Meritorious," 23.

⁴⁵ Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons, "Untying a Knot from the Inside Out: Reflections on the 'Paradox' of Supererogation," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 27, no. 2 (2010): 29.

⁴⁶ Alfred Archer and Michael Ridge, "The Heroism Paradox: Another Paradox of Supererogation," *Philosophical Studies* 172 (2015): 1576.

⁴⁷ Horgan and Timmons, "Untying the Knot," 37. Joseph Raz offers a good explanation of this "good-ought tie-up" approximately 35 years prior to Horgan and Timmons. However, he does not attempt to assign a label to the concept. See Joseph Raz, "Permissions and Supererogation," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 12 (1975): 164, 166.

⁴⁸ Claire Benn, "The Enemy of the Good: Supererogation and Requiring Perfection," *Utilitas* 30 (2018): 334.

supererogation that although it is “easy to understand,” it is also “puzzling”⁴⁹ and even “impossible” from a moral point of view.”⁵⁰ Thus, defending the category of supererogation requires a “conceptual disconnect between moral goodness and obligation.”⁵¹ If *moral goodness* and *obligation* cannot be divorced, then the threefold deontic classificatory scheme remains and Urmson’s thesis is disproved. In one way or another, every argument *for* or *against* supererogation is a response to this paradox.

In the early 1980s, Elizabeth Pybus put forward an interesting argument against supererogation. She began by agreeing with Urmson that there are occasions when we commend saints and heroes in a *moral* fashion (as opposed to non-moral or amoral). However, this is where she parts ways with Urmson. She writes: “I would suggest that if my commendation is genuinely moral, then my genuine act of commendation does commit me to saying that this really is how man ought to be. But if I do have a genuine *moral* view that this is how people ought to be, then I must think that I, and others, ought to live up to this, and regard those who do not as falling short of the moral standard.”⁵² According to Pybus, I cannot *morally* commend the soldier for throwing himself on the grenade to save his fellow comrades unless I too am willing to be the sort of person who is willing to perform similar acts of courage. Prima facie, it appears that Pybus is suggesting that if I deem the performance of an act morally praiseworthy, then I am obligated to perform the act. Of course, this would do away with the paradox of supererogation, for if this were her view, there would be no such thing as an act that is morally commendable

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Young also refers to this as a “puzzle” (i.e., “traditional puzzle”). See Elizabeth D. Young, “Is Supererogation More Than Just Costly Sacrifice?” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 77 (2015): 125.

⁵⁰ James Dreier, “Why Ethical Satisficing Makes Sense and Rational Satisficing Doesn’t,” in *Satisficing and Maximizing: Moral Theorists on Practical Reason*, ed. Michael Byron (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 147–148. Interestingly, this does not result in Dreier necessarily rejecting the classification. He simply asserts that there might be more than one moral point of view—one being more ambitious and the other more relaxed—that allows for such acts.

⁵¹ Horgan and Timmons, “Untying the Knot,” 37.

⁵² Elizabeth Pybus, “Saints and Heroes,” *Philosophy* 57 (1992): 194; Christopher New seems to also share this view. See Christopher New, “Saints, Heroes and Utilitarians,” *Philosophy* 49, no. 188 (1974): 183.

and at the same time non-obligatory. Susan Hale expresses this viewpoint when she writes, "All actions which are morally good are morally required."⁵³ However, this is *not* Pybus' view.

Pybus argues that rejecting the classification of supererogation does not necessarily force us to accept the extreme conclusion that in praising an act, I now am obligated to perform that act. In her view, this is where Urmson went wrong. To use Pybus' words, Urmson seemed to think that if we deny that there are acts of supererogation, we will be forced into saying that "if we morally admire and emulate the heroic doctor . . . we commit ourselves to the view that we *all* should seek out plague-ridden cities."⁵⁴ Pybus dubbed this view an "absurdity." Pybus suggests that a moral commendation of an act does not necessarily entail an obligation to perform that same act. She writes:

To say, therefore, that someone is a saint or hero, and thereby to express a moral judgment, is to say that that person has succeeded in being what we all ought to be . . . By this I do not mean that we should *do* what the saints and heroes do, but that we must recognize that if we consider such actions susceptible of moral praise, we commit ourselves to saying that what leads to the performance of those actions is part of the equipment of the morally good person which we should all try to be. What I am getting at, therefore, is that in praising the actions we are praising what lies behind the actions, i.e. dispositions, or, more specifically, particular virtues.

But if we morally praise a particular virtue, and do so because we think highly of an action which issues from the possession of that virtue, then although we are not committing ourselves to the performance of those specific actions, we do recognize the necessity of performance of actions which spring from the possession of a high degree of the virtue in question.⁵⁵

In what Patricia McGoldrick calls an "ingenious observation,"⁵⁶ Pybus relocates the moral commendation of an act to the virtue that lies behind it rather than the specific act itself. She draws an important distinction between "ought to do" and "ought to be" and develops her argument accordingly. This

⁵³ Susan Hale, "Against Supererogation," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 28 (1991): 274.

⁵⁴ Pybus, "Saints and Heroes," 196.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁵⁶ McGoldrick, "Saints and Heroes: A Plea," 524.

allows her to praise an act while simultaneously denying that every moral agent is now obligated to run out of the door and perform that specific act. Because Urmson viewed the moral commendation as applying strictly to the act itself, the only way he could praise the act without requiring every agent to perform it was to introduce the supererogatory classification. Pybus believes she has avoided the same conclusion that Urmson wanted to avoid but without having to modify the threefold system of act classification that Urmson set out to defeat.

In support of her argument, Pybus first discusses what it is about the acts of the doctor and soldier that we morally commend. In Urmson's account, the doctor and the soldier are both willing to make great sacrifices for other people which require great courage. According to Pybus, if we think that the act of the doctor and soldier are morally good, then we too "should be sufficiently courageous to perform sacrificial actions."⁵⁷ However, because people live different lives and find themselves in varying circumstances, it is not the particular act of the soldier or doctor that morality requires we emulate, but rather, the development of the virtue of courage that gives rise to the sacrificial behavior in the first place. It was the disposition toward courage that predisposed the soldier and the doctor to behave rightly when the opportunity presented itself. To state this differently, when we commend an act as morally meritorious, we commit ourselves to performing *token* acts of that same *type* but not necessarily the particular act that originally prompted our praise. With this groundwork laid, Pybus asks the reader to consider three different priests. Priests, she states, are mostly admired for their willingness to be celibate. However, for some priests, this might not be the most challenging part. One man may love privacy but have to sacrifice this "love" in order to live in a community with others who might be disagreeable in nature. Another may have a weak stomach but have to visit the sick (one of a priest's many duties). The last example she gives is that of a priest who is abnormally self-conscious but who still must stand and deliver a message on a weekly basis as part of

⁵⁷ Pybus, "Saints and Heroes," 197.

his duties. What all three of these cases have in common with the doctor and soldier is that they all “have enough courage to accept what is morally required of them.”⁵⁸ True to her theory, Pybus praises not the specific act, but the *virtue of courage* that lies behind the act. She goes on to write, “we should all be willing to be brave enough to do what is morally required of us. But this does not suggest that we should all do the same things, only that we should, *morally* should, commit ourselves to a way of life in which we are willing to use all our courage to meet the moral demands which arise for us.”⁵⁹

I would agree with McGoldrick that Pybus’ move is quite ingenious. However, it is McGoldrick herself that responds to Pybus in an effort to salvage supererogation. McGoldrick suggests that Pybus “leaves unargued the question of whether developing the habitual dispositions and virtues from which such actions spring . . . is required of us as a duty.”⁶⁰ Pybus simply *assumes* that if an ideal is morally praiseworthy, then we are bound by duty to both inculcate and express through particular acts the corresponding virtue in every situation that calls for the type of act that is reflective of that ideal. But according to McGoldrick, this assumption is “precisely the issue at stake” and “beg[s] the question in favour of the trichotomous taxonomy.”⁶¹ Although Pybus is relocating the obligation to the virtue that lies behind the act, she still embraces the notion that if a virtue possesses moral worth, then one is obligated to cultivate it within oneself. To borrow Horgan and Timmons’ language, Pybus assumes the position that the good is tied up with obligation. In other words, a moral agent is obligated to develop a moral virtue for the simple fact that it is considered good from a moral perspective. However, as McGoldrick is arguing, this is the exact issue at stake and cannot therefore be assumed. The question of supererogation must be assessed from a neutral vantage point that does not take for granted the threefold or fourfold classificatory schema.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 197.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 198.

⁶⁰ McGoldrick, “Saints and Heroes: A Plea,” 524.

⁶¹ Ibid., 524.

McGoldrick's next move is characteristic of moral philosophers who endorse the supererogatory classification. In an attempt to argue for acts of supererogation from *neutral* ground, she states that what distinguishes acts of supererogation from acts that are classified as duties is that they are "performed at extreme risk to one's own life and well being." Her claim is rooted in Kant's moral philosophy. In Kant's view, we have duties to ourselves as well as to others. Therefore, the individual has a moral duty to consider themselves as well as others in all moral deliberations. Because I too possess intrinsic worth as a rational human being, my "own aspirations, goals, and interests" count in those moments when I am trying to figure out what duty requires of me. To say otherwise—that *I must always, as a matter of duty, make the greatest sacrifice for others at my own expense*—is to fail to recognize my own inherent worth and to treat myself only as a means and not as an end. This, of course, would violate Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative: "So act that you use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means."⁶² Because "rational nature exists as an end in itself"⁶³ and I possess a rational nature, I am to treat all people, *including* myself, as an end and never as a mere means. For McGoldrick, we cannot eliminate the supererogatory classification without also requiring that the moral agent "abrogate his own self worth."⁶⁴ There must exist some degree of latitude for the moral agent if their own aspirations and pursuits matter. Now, if a person out of *love* chooses to make extreme sacrifices for the sake of others on a continual basis, that is fine according to McGoldrick and would serve as a great example of supererogatory behavior.⁶⁵ What is offensive is the idea that a person must do so out of a sense of duty.

⁶² Kant, *Groundwork*, 41.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁴ McGoldrick, "Saints and Heroes: A Plea," 524.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 526.

The perspective that “extreme cost is ... an essential feature of supererogatory actions” is labeled the *Extreme Cost View* by Claire Benn.⁶⁶ In his very well-known book, *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls takes this position even though he does not use the same language. Concerning supererogatory acts, he writes: “[they] are not required, though normally they would be were it not for the loss or risk involved for the agent himself.”⁶⁷ From this perspective, if the act in question does not require much of the agent, then whatever else can be said, it is not a viable candidate for supererogation. Several other philosophers agree that the degree of sacrifice, cost, or risk⁶⁸ accompanying a particular act plays a decisive role in determining the moral classification of an act. Frances Kamm acknowledges this point. She writes: “It is also commonly thought that if the efforts required of us to help are high, helping is supererogatory, i.e., beyond the call of duty.”⁶⁹ Laura Ciubotarasu-Pricop seems to also endorse this view, writing: “Actions required by extreme circumstances transcend the duty. . . .” The three examples of extreme circumstances that she provides are terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and famine. During these times, a person acting altruistically goes beyond the boundaries of duty in performing acts that “place the welfare of the others above their own.”⁷⁰ Thus, according to Ciubotarasu-Pricop, the person behaves in a supererogatory manner because they prioritize others’ needs above their own safety in extreme circumstances. However, the problem with such a view is the implicit assumption that great sacrifice can never be a part of fulfilling an obligation. But as Joel Feinberg points out, this is not necessarily the case. Feinberg explicitly endorses the Extreme Cost View with one caveat. Similar to Russell Jacobs, Feinberg makes the point that though acts of

⁶⁶ Claire Benn, “Supererogation, Optionality, and Cost,” *Philosophical Studies* (2017): 10.

⁶⁷ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971), 117. Rawls reiterates this point on p. 438.

⁶⁸ In the literature, words such as “cost” and “risk” are used interchangeably with “sacrifice” to communicate the same general idea.

⁶⁹ Frances M. Kamm, “Supererogation and Obligation,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 82 (1985): 119.

⁷⁰ Laura Ciubotarasu-Pricop, “Supererogatory Actions and Their Moral Value,” *Cultural and Linguistic Communication* 3, no. 2 (2013): 161.

supererogation require significant sacrifice, performing one's duty can as well (this will be discussed shortly).⁷¹ He begins by agreeing with Urmson that the doctor who decides to relinquish both comfort and safety to volunteer to help medical workers in a distant, plague-stricken city that is not his own performs an act of supererogation. Feinberg then asks, "In what way does the doctor's act 'exceed' duty?"⁷² Feinberg concludes that it is not sacrifice per se that resulted in a supererogatory classification. This would be an oversimplification. After all, as Feinberg points out, the doctor whose residence and practice are in the plague-stricken city is also required to make great sacrifices even though he is only thought to be doing his duty (this is enough to refute Ciobotarasu-Pricop's position). Unlike Ciobotarasu-Pricop, Feinberg is arguing that there are instances when great sacrifice is a part of fulfilling a duty. Implicit within this view is the idea that in a responsible account of moral worth, there are "degrees of praiseworthiness regarding morally obligatory actions . . . [as well as] supererogatory actions."⁷³ This is significant because it allows for the possibility that a morally obligatory act could deserve a significant amount of praise while a supererogatory act might deserve only a small amount. Consequently, great sacrifice in extreme circumstances does not necessarily result in a supererogatory classification. Returning to Feinberg's view, what is the difference between a duty and a supererogatory act if great sacrifice cannot characterize both? Feinberg concludes, "The sacrificial element in supererogatory acts then does not necessarily exceed that in the performance of duty; what it exceeds is the sacrifice *normally* involved in the doing of duty."⁷⁴

Feinberg is one of the best examples of someone who thinks that in order for an act to be supererogatory, the agent performing the act must *pay the price*, so to speak. His view also allows for the common-sense intuition that at times, even a duty can require great sacrifice. This is the main point at which

⁷¹ Daniel Dombrowski also affirms this point, writing: "we should not forget how hard the way of duty may be . . ." See Daniel A. Dombrowski, "Back to Sainthood," *Philosophy Today* 33, no. 1 (1989): 57.

⁷² Feinberg, "Supererogation and Rules," 280.

⁷³ Amy Massoud, "Moral Worth and Supererogation," *Ethics* 126 (2016): 693.

⁷⁴ Feinberg, "Supererogation and Rules," 280.

Russell Jacobs challenges McGoldrick's view. In an effort to show that Pybus' argument is circular, McGoldrick is right on insisting that we must adjudicate between the threefold and fourfold classification from an independent vantage point that does not presume either theory. However, her claim that an act cannot be classified as a duty if it requires extreme sacrifice or cost to the agent is problematic. Russell Jacobs agrees with McGoldrick that we have a duty to respect our own intrinsic value. He also agrees with her that in some circumstances, the level of sacrifice that an act requires is enough to warrant a supererogatory classification. However, he does not go as far as McGoldrick. In what is his chief criticism of her view, he writes: "But the more extreme claim, that we are *never* required to make large sacrifices for others, seems both unsupported by her premise, and implausible."⁷⁵

Regarding the implausibility of McGoldrick's claim, consider my marriage. My wife and I have been married for ten years. On our marriage day, I made a promise to her that I would stay by her side in health or sickness. In the years to come, if she were to get gravely sick and be bedridden for an extended amount of time, it would still be my duty to love and serve her no matter the personal cost. Although I would hope to provide this promised care out of love and not a mere sense of duty, I would still be doing nothing more than my duty in view of previous vows. This is the point that Jacobs is making, that there are times when fulfilling our duty requires a significant level of personal sacrifice. If this is not the case and McGoldrick's Extreme Cost View is correct, then my behavior would be considered supererogatory and by definition, would not be required. However, this conclusion would lead to a contradiction in view of my past vows. As the example demonstrates, while McGoldrick puts forth great effort in an attempt to develop an argument for supererogation that does not presume either the threefold or fourfold schema, she goes too far in identifying "extreme cost" as an essential feature of supererogation for the simple reason that at least in some circumstances,

⁷⁵ Russell Jacobs, "Obligation, Supererogation, and Self-Sacrifice," *Philosophy* 62 (1987): 100.

discharging obligations can be quite costly. Jacobs writes: “No easy generalizations will work when we are discussing cost-imposed limits on obligations.”⁷⁶ Jacobs also criticizes Pybus’ view. In his estimation, both Pybus and McGoldrick go too far in their positions. He writes, “It seems false to say that high cost always overrides duty as it is to say that high cost never overrides duty.”⁷⁷ While McGoldrick claims that an act cannot be classified as a duty if it entails some level of sacrifice (or else we will violate our own intrinsic self-worth), Pybus is on the other end of the spectrum. She does not allow for the fact that intuitively, the majority of people would agree that “high cost may well block moral obligation.”⁷⁸

The importance of considering Pybus’ argument against supererogation alongside other related arguments is that it introduces certain key ideas in the discussion of supererogation. For example, the *paradox of supererogation* and the related *good-ought tie-up* was introduced in discussing McGoldrick’s criticism of Pybus. Secondly, Pybus introduces the notion of virtue, or dispositions, into the discourse. One of the more interesting debates among moral philosophers is whether character, motive, or intent should play a role in the moral classification of acts. This will be presented in more detail later in the chapter and is integral to chapter four. And third, this subsection is important because whether or not you adhere to the Extreme Cost View of supererogation will determine in part whether smaller, unheroic acts or favors can qualify for supererogation.

Before moving to the next topic, I would like to say something else regarding Pybus’ view. I have always found her view intriguing. However, I believe that one of its serious weaknesses is that she might not be able to give a clear answer to a direct question regarding a specific course of action in a particular situation. For example, if I were to ask Pybus to give a clear, yes or no answer to the question, “Was it the soldier’s duty in Urmson’s example to sacrifice his life to save his comrades by throwing himself on the grenade?”

⁷⁶ Ibid., 101.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 100.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 99.

she would find herself in a predicament. If she answers “no,” then the act is fully optional though it clearly possesses moral worth. Thus, answering “no” would result in an endorsement of supererogation. On the other hand, if she answers yes, then she would be giving the type of answer that she believed was responsible for Urmson mistakenly affirming the category of supererogation in the first place. After all, to answer “yes” would seem to suggest that there is a particular behavior that one is required to perform in order to act rightly. Yet, Pybus’ main objective was to argue that we do not need supererogation because in commending an act, we are not saying that everyone should be performing the exact same act. Rather, we are commending the virtue that lies behind the act and requiring all moral creatures including ourselves to cultivate that same virtue so that we will be in the best position to perform acts of that same type when required. Therefore, Pybus cannot give an unqualified “yes” to the question presented above because in order to stay true to her theory, she must redirect our focus to the disposition that lies behind the act. However, at some point this does not satisfy. After all, it is not logically impossible that I and five others find ourselves in the exact same situation of Urmson’s soldier. If this were to occur and I asked Pybus, “Is it a duty for each individual soldier in our group of six to act with the utmost courage?” then would she not have to answer yes? And in this specific situation, would this not entail that all six of us must throw ourselves on the grenade if we are to avoid moral wrongdoing? This is what the virtue of courage seems to require in this instance for the simple reason that there do not seem to be any act-alternatives by which courage could also be expressed. Therefore, if we all acted courageously, then needless lives would be wasted. If some of us do not throw ourselves on the grenade, then it appears that some of us are not courageous, which is morally unacceptable in Pybus’ view. In addition, to say that all six people are required to perform a particular behavior to fulfill the moral requirement to exemplify courage seems to be the type of conclusion (focused on a particular behavior) that Pybus wants to avoid. On the other hand, she cannot reasonably retreat from the question and redirect our focus to the virtuous dispositions behind the act. At some point, you cannot

hide behind virtue. You must answer the question. Of course we should be developing the appropriate virtues, but the real challenge is to figure out what those virtues entail from one situation to the next.

The Broader View of Supererogation

As explained in the last section, philosophers such as Patricia McGoldrick and Joel Feinberg endorse the Extreme Cost View, which identifies “extreme cost” as an essential attribute of supererogation. Jacobs objected to this view because it is too formulaic, whereas for him our moral experience is nuanced and cannot be easily subsumed under the banner of broad generalized principles. As he pointed out, there are instances where the performance of our duty can cost the agent a great deal. In these cases, the cost of performing one’s duty is extreme. Thus, *extreme cost* is not the exclusive property of supererogation which poses a serious challenge to McGoldrick’s view. I sympathize with Jacobs’ view. Duties can require great sacrifice. Therefore, from a logical standpoint, *extreme cost* cannot be a defining characteristic of supererogation because it is a property that sometimes characterizes a duty. For a property to serve as a *defining* characteristic of any particular classification, it would have to be the exclusive property of that act category. Because extreme cost does not characterize supererogatory acts alone, it cannot serve as the distinguishing feature of this classification.

There are several reasons why Jacobs’ debunking of the Extreme Cost View is important. For the purposes of this section, I want to focus on one in particular. If the Extreme Cost View had been correct, this would have logically precluded smaller, unheroic and unsaintly acts from being supererogatory.⁷⁹ This would be problematic, because ordinary people frequently perform acts that possess moral worth but are not obligatory. Benn writes, “Just as doing one’s duty can be more or less dramatic, acts of supererogation can be more

⁷⁹ Benn, “Supererogation, Optionality, and Cost,” 10.

or less heroic: giving a small gift to a friend or doing a favour are just as intuitively supererogatory as more extreme, heroic acts.”⁸⁰ She defends this claim by appealing to the notion of *comparative cost*. She begins by acknowledging, “No one denies that the notion of optionality is central to the very notion of supererogation.”⁸¹ For this reason, an act of supererogation is often framed as a “non-duty” since the deed is considered purely optional.⁸² To put it differently, it is normally thought that all acts which fulfill a duty are obligatory while all supererogatory acts are optional. However, as Benn points out, this is not always the case.

She first points out that there are instances when an act can fulfill a duty while also being supererogatory. As Benn notes, these cases of supererogation are labeled “oversubscription” and “duty-plus” by David Heyd and Joel Feinberg respectively.⁸³ Benn asks the reader to consider the following example: “Suppose I promise to give you £100 and then give you £200. This act clearly fulfils the duty generated by the promise I made. Under the assumption that I could have just given £100 and that instead I chose to give £200 (and that it would be morally good to give you £200 rather than £100), this act is also supererogatory.”⁸⁴ In this scenario, giving £100 represents the bare minimum that is required in order to fulfill the duty. By giving £200, I have behaved in a supererogatory manner while also discharging my duty. This raises an interesting point. If one act can fulfill a duty while also being supererogatory, then those acts which are normally required cannot be *solely* depicted as acts which fulfill duties and those acts which are normally optional cannot be solely described as non-duties.⁸⁵ The situation is more complex. What is needed is an account of supererogation that draws a

⁸⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁸¹ Ibid., 2.

⁸² Neera Badhwar uses the phrase, “purely optional” when describing the non-obligatory status of a supererogatory act. See Neera K. Badhwar, “Justice and Supererogation,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 22 (1985): 125.

⁸³ Benn, “Supererogation, Optionality, and Cost,” 5; Heyd, *Supererogation*, 1, 135; Feinberg, “Supererogation and Rules,” 282.

⁸⁴ Benn, “Supererogation, Optionality, and Cost,” 5.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 5.

different sort of line between duty and supererogation. The example above is sufficient to show that you cannot say that a dutiful act discharges an obligation while an act of supererogation does not. In this case, the supererogatory act discharges the duty while also going far beyond the minimum that was required to satisfy the obligation. It is here that Benn introduces the notion of comparative cost.

Rather than assessing the cost of an act to judge whether it is supererogatory, Benn suggests that it is *comparative cost* that matters. She writes, “There are multiple ways of fulfilling a duty: *we can fulfil it minimally or we can fulfil it in a way that goes beyond the minimum.*”⁸⁶ According to Benn, the class of acts that are classified as duties are the ones that “involve the least cost to the agent of all the permissible acts available.”⁸⁷ All that is meant by “available” is that the act is sufficient to discharge the duty. Using the notion of comparative cost, Benn then argues that a supererogatory act is any that fulfills a duty “in a way that goes beyond this minimum.” In other words, the supererogatory act is optional because it “involve[s] greater cost to the agent than the bare minimum.” So rather than classify an act as supererogatory if it is costly, an act is only classified as supererogatory if it costs the agent *more* than other permissible alternatives. In this context, *permissible* means “able to fulfill the obligation.” In other words, although giving £100 represents the bare minimum you could do to fulfill your duty and therefore is a permissible alternative, you have the *option* to give more (i.e. £200) with the personal cost being greater. If you decide to do so, you have chosen to fulfill your obligation in a costlier manner than the bare minimum required. Thus, the act you chose was supererogatory because it cost more than other alternative acts that were available. This is important because the Comparative Cost View carves out theoretical space for small acts of supererogation. According to this view, an act does not have to cost the agent much in order to be supererogatory. Rather, it must only cost more than those acts which “involve *merely* fulfilling

⁸⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 6.

our duty.” Therefore, even though an act may not involve a great cost to the acting agent, it still can be a candidate for supererogation so long as it costs more than other permissible acts which can also fulfill the duty. Thus, it expands the boundaries of supererogation, permitting a wider range of acts to qualify for supererogatory status.

This is important for numerous reasons, three of which I will highlight. First, the majority of people go a lifetime without encountering a situation that calls for a saintly or heroic act. Very few of us therefore would ever have the opportunity to supererogate. Secondly, if “smaller” acts (not costing the agent too much) cannot qualify as supererogatory, then we are forced to say either (1) they do not possess moral value, or (2) they are required. Both outcomes are unappealing. On the one hand, giving a gift to a friend or paying someone a personal visit when you only promised to call (assuming that the individual prefers a personal visit) seems to be valuable from a moral perspective. Who would want to embrace any theory that says otherwise? On the other hand, if we want to say that these smaller acts possess moral worth, then without supererogation we must say that they are required (unless we take Pybus’ position, which raises other problems as previously explained). This seems unrealistic. Surely I am not required to help every single person in every single instance of my life. Of course, one could try and escape this dilemma by turning to Kant’s notion of imperfect duties. This might allow one to uphold the view that smaller acts possess moral value without having to embrace supererogation or require these acts on every occasion. Moral philosophers such as Marcia Baron have advocated such an approach, although I am inclined to think this approach is faulty.⁸⁸ Surely there are small acts of kindness or favors that are never required even though morally praiseworthy to perform. Giving a gift to a complete stranger might be one example. If so, then small acts of supererogation cannot be subsumed under imperfect duties.

⁸⁸ Baron was not arguing for the inclusion of small acts of supererogation. Her aim was much broader. In her article, “A Kantian Take on the Supererogatory,” she suggests that Kant’s imperfect duties can accommodate acts which are normally classified as supererogatory. See Baron, “A Kantian Take on the Supererogatory,” 350.

For the topic at hand, it is sufficient to state that allowing for the possibility of smaller acts of supererogation better accords with the facts of our experience. The last reason that expanding the boundaries of supererogation to accommodate smaller acts is important is methodological. Horgan and Timmons point out that in the supererogation literature, there has been an “almost exclusive focus on saintly and heroic acts as primary cases of supererogation [and that this] has been unfortunate, distracting attention from cases that are far less contentious (even if not wholly uncontentious).”⁸⁹ They consider this unfortunate because the saintly and heroic deeds of supererogation are laced with interpretative difficulty due to the deontic tone in which the agent responds when later asked about the saintly or heroic deed. Horgan and Timmons write:

Furthermore (and this is our second point), cases of saints and heroes, at least those cases that have been documented and studied by social scientists and historians, raise the following well-known problem of interpretation which makes them particularly contentious. When interviewed, people who perform saintly or heroic acts consistently make claims much like the following, which is excerpted from an interview with one of the so-called righteous gentiles who, during the 1930s and 1940s, risked their lives to hide Jews from Nazis: “I don’t think I did anything that special. I think what I did is what everybody normally should be doing. We all should help one another. It’s common sense and common caring for people.”⁹⁰

The point is that it is not uncommon for those who have performed saintly or heroic feats to say that they did nothing more than their duty. Many of these moral agents would balk at the idea that they went above and beyond the call of duty and might even condemn others who would not be willing to act in a similar manner under similar circumstances. This demands at least a pause before we classify such acts as supererogatory. For this reason, Horgan and Timmons believe that the most straightforward method for investigating supererogation is to focus on the “ordinary, mundane cases of supererogation” because these are “comparatively uncontentious” compared to the others.⁹¹ I

⁸⁹ Horgan and Timmons, “Untying a Knot,” 40.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 39–40.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

might add that this perspective conflicts with Urmson's methodology. Urmson believed that the best way to argue for supererogation was to focus on the saintly and heroic acts. These, he wrote, are the "conspicuous cases" of the "whole realm of acts that lie outside the trichotomy."⁹² Urmson's methodological approach is on full display in the opening paragraph of M.W. Jackson's "The Nature of Supererogation": "Heroism is the archetype of supererogation. If the moral facts are in doubt, it [heroism] affords the clearest example, marking the far end of the continuum."⁹³ The basic idea is that if there is any hope of establishing supererogation as a legitimate classification, these more grandiose acts hold the most promise. I suspect that most moral philosophers have agreed with Urmson on this point, as evidenced by the fact that most of the examples offered by supererogationists tend to be saintly or heroic in nature.

Aside from methodological debate, the more important point is that a significant number of moral philosophers embrace the possibility of mundane acts of supererogation. Though Jackson believed that heroic acts were the clearest instances of supererogation, he did state: "Many trifling good acts are not obligatory and so are supererogatory."⁹⁴ In the very article that launched the contemporary discussion on supererogation, Urmson stated, "It is possible to go just beyond one's duty by being a little more generous, forbearing, helpful, or forgiving than fair dealing demands."⁹⁵ Chisholm and Sosa write: "But supererogation—which we will equate with non-obligatory well-doing—is not restricted to what is saintly and heroic; it also encompasses those small favors and acts of courtesy that ordinary men sometimes go out of their way to perform."⁹⁶ This same idea is espoused by Michael Clark in the statement, "An act of supererogation typically involves some sacrifice, or risk of sacrifice, on the part of the agent. The degree of sacrifice may well be too modest to put

⁹² Urmson, "Saints and Heroes," 205.

⁹³ M.W. Jackson, "The Nature of Supererogation," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 20 (1986): 289.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 290.

⁹⁵ Urmson, "Saints and Heroes," 205.

⁹⁶ Chisholm and Sosa, "Intrinsic Preferability," 326.

the agent into the category of saint or hero ... but he will be forgoing some benefit to which he has a right.”⁹⁷ Clark’s use of the word “degree” is particularly helpful because it suggests that supererogation be viewed on a continuum, with saintly and heroic deeds occupying one end and those acts which go barely above the call of duty on the other.

What is interesting about so many of these statements is that they are presented without argument. The majority are made while the moral philosopher is arguing some other point. The majority of moral philosophers who endorse supererogation tend simply to assume that if there is such a classification as supererogation, then smaller acts are automatically included. But why have smaller acts of supererogation apparently been given a free pass? Although he was not responding this point, Alfred Archer’s remarks provide insight. He wrote:

Supererogation is typically taken to be a technical term that is roughly equivalent to the ordinary language phrase ‘beyond the call of duty’. The starting point of almost all attempts to analyze supererogation is that this word is roughly equivalent to the ordinary language phrase ‘beyond the call of duty’. Given that supererogation is taken to be a technical term for this ordinary language phrase, our analysis of the concept should be true to our use of the phrase. Accepting this gives us reason to make our definition of supererogation wide enough to encompass all acts that we would describe as ‘beyond the call of duty’.⁹⁸

Archer was arguing that we may have reason to think that someone could be blamed in certain circumstances for omitting acts that are beyond the call of duty. If this proves to be the case, then as Archer admits, we would “be going against [the] well-established view of the supererogatory” in allowing acts that are “blameworthy to omit” to still qualify as supererogatory.⁹⁹ Though Archer knew some would have a major problem with this revision to the definition of supererogation, he maintained: “It may well be true that many have accepted that part of what it is for an act to be supererogatory is for it to be blameless to

⁹⁷ Clark, “The Meritorious,” 30.

⁹⁸ Archer, “Do We Need to Make Room for Quasi-Supererogation?” *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 50 (2016): 348–349.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 349.

omit. This, though, does not give us reason to stay loyal to this analysis when presented with an act that is beyond the call of duty but blameless to omit.”¹⁰⁰ In other words, if an act of moral worth goes beyond the call of duty, then it is supererogatory. Archer might have something like the following in mind: Due to the various issues and complexities that can arise when discussing supererogation, we must keep two questions in mind when evaluating any act: (1) Does the act possess moral worth? and (2) Does it go beyond the call of duty? If the answer is “yes” to both questions, then it is supererogatory even if other properties are absent. Some of our conceptions of what characterizes a supererogatory act may need to be reexamined, and we can do this so long as we keep the fundamental criteria in mind.

The point of this digression is to suggest why smaller acts of supererogation are considered as such without a robust argument in their favor. They seem to come with the territory of supererogation in general. Archer’s reasoning helps explain why this is. According to Archer, our analysis of the concept of supererogation should be true to the phrase, “beyond the call of duty.” In other words, if an act of moral worth seems to go beyond what is required, then it is supererogatory. Either an act does or does not fit the bill. If it does not, then the deed must be classified otherwise. If it does, whether small or heroic, then it is supererogatory. And once you have endorsed supererogation, only an *a priori* commitment to the Extreme Cost View would stand in the way of the otherwise intuitive endorsement of the full range of supererogatory acts. But once the Extreme Cost View is defeated, the possibility of small acts of supererogation seems so intuitively plausible that proof might not seem necessary. This would explain why smaller acts of supererogation are often embraced but not robustly defended. The burden of proof seems to lie with the moral philosopher who wants to count only the saintly or heroic deed as supererogatory. Stated differently, common-sense strongly suggests that if you can exceed the call of duty in grandiose, heroic fashion, then you can also do so in a smaller, more humble fashion.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 350.

Much more could be said regarding this debate. However, my goal has been to show that the Extreme Cost View is problematic for several reasons. I would prefer to reject supererogation altogether than to accept the more restrictive view that seems to arbitrarily exclude smaller acts.

Acts, Dispositions, Motives, and Intentions

Two general divisions can be drawn concerning supererogation. First, there is the division between those that endorse and those that reject the possibility of acts of supererogation. Secondly, there is a further division between those that endorse supererogation: those who believe that internal, psychological elements can affect the deontic status of an act (i.e., motives, intentions, character) and those who do not. This section is committed to discussing different individuals who argue that either motives or intentions have deontic relevance when evaluating acts.

There is an “anatomy” to the moral life. First, there is the act itself. Secondly, there is the agent’s intention at the time they acted. Third, there is the agent’s motive, which is different from their intention. And fourth, there is what in ordinary language we refer to as *character*. This concept is a bit more ambiguous. When we speak of an agent’s *character*, we seem to refer to a more permanent construct that informs moral attitudes and orients that person to think, feel, and act in a consistent manner from one situation to the next. Stanley Hauerwas writes, “Character is not just the sum of all that we do as agents, but rather it is the particular direction our agency acquires by choosing to act in some ways rather than others.”¹⁰¹ In this quote, Hauerwas is making the Aristotelian point that our acts over time shape our character by cultivating our dispositions to particular virtues.¹⁰² As Aristotle writes: “we become just by

¹⁰¹ Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1985), 117.

¹⁰² Of course, the opposite is also true as well in what Joseph Kotva refers to as a “circular relationship.” Kotva makes the clear point that actions now only flow from states of character, but they also help shape moral character as well. See Joseph Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996), 29,

doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions.”¹⁰³ In his discussion of character, Hauerwas also uses the word “orientation” to signify the *particular direction of agency* that our acts create. Relative to this project, the important point that Hauerwas makes is that character can be thought of as the *particular direction*, or orientation, of the entire self. Intuitively, a person’s various moral orientations are more permanent than acts, intentions, and motives, which can be more fleeting in comparison. While the notion of character is closely connected with, and might even subsume, intentions and motives, it is distinct and must be treated as such when discussing supererogation.

In light of these comments, the question related to supererogation is, “Should intentions, motives, or character count in the classification of acts?” If the answer is yes, then it must be decided which of the three (or any combination) should play a part. Currently, there is no clear consensus. My goal, therefore, is to illuminate this aspect of supererogation because not only is it of the utmost importance in moral philosophy, but it is the “internal world” of intent, motive, and character which is indispensably crucial to the larger, theological context of this thesis.

As with most topics related to supererogation, it is fitting to begin with Urmson’s essay, “Saints and Heroes.” In my reading of Urmson, he never discusses the role of intentions or motives in the classification of an act. And although he uses the words “saint” and “hero” to refer to the person who has performed a *saintly* or *heroic* act, he does not address the character of the agent. In his defense, his task was much broader. He was primarily interested in arguing for the possibility of supererogation itself by establishing the inadequacy of the threefold classification of moral acts. Therefore, the role of character, intentions, and motives was peripheral to his aim and so we need not make too big of a deal of this omission. That being said, many moral

105. Cf. Richard Mouw, *The God Who Commands* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 129–130.

¹⁰³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II.4 1103b, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), 19.

philosophers believe that this oversight (as innocent as it might be) is significant. After all, most would have a problem saying that a person behaved “above the call of duty” if the motive for acting was completely selfish and had nothing to do with benefiting another individual.

Methodologically, it is efficacious at the beginning of any discussion to eliminate any feature that is not thought to play a part in act classification. *Character* is such a feature. At first glance, this feels counterintuitive. Surely a person’s character matters in classifying an act. However, this is not the case. It is common to hear someone defending a friend’s unacceptable or immoral behavior with the colloquialism, “That is *out-of-character* for them.” Implicit within this statement is the idea that our character does not *determine* our behavior in every instance. In other words, although a person may be of honest character and thus be consistently oriented to behave in an honest manner, this does not mean that they are incapable of acting dishonestly. To be oriented toward the virtue of honesty means that a person enjoys being honest, believes it to be virtuous, would encourage others to do so, and acts accordingly unless there are extenuating circumstances that might warrant a dishonest act in a particular instance. However, while a person might typically behave in an honest manner, it is not hard to imagine this same individual failing to speak or act honestly in a particular instance due to some form of external pressure (e.g., fear of rejection, the desire for approval, the hope for a promotion, the desire to escape punishment or censure, etc.). As the Psalmist writes, “we are dust.”¹⁰⁴ However, we would not say that the honest person who has lied on one occasion is dishonest. Rather, we would either say, “Well, nobody is perfect,” or “That is not typical of them.” One behavioral slip is not enough to require us to view this person’s character differently. The important point in all of this is that a person’s act is not always reflective of their underlying character. It may be or it may not. A person with a vicious character may on one occasion behave in a virtuous manner. As John Stuart Mill writes:

¹⁰⁴ Ps. 103:14, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). From this point forward, this translation is used unless otherwise noted.

“a right action does not necessarily indicate a virtuous character . . .”¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, a person with a virtuous character may on one occasion behave in a vicious manner. Therefore, character is of no *direct* relevance to supererogation.¹⁰⁶ To quote Mill once more: “for certainly no known ethical standard decides an action to be good or bad because it is done by a good or bad man, still less because done by an amiable, a brave, or a benevolent man, or the contrary.”¹⁰⁷ However, this does not mean that character is irrelevant to acts of supererogation. Quite the contrary, virtuous dispositions that comprise one’s character can contribute to an increase of supererogatory acts being performed over the course of time because of the connection between character and proper motive. The *indirect* relevance of character to supererogation and its link with motive will be discussed at length towards the end of chapter four. Because character is not directly relevant to the deontic status of an act, all that remains is to examine whether intentions or motives are of classificatory relevance.

In supererogatory literature, this is the point where the dialogue becomes quite nuanced and careful attention is required. Many moral philosophers write about motive and intention. I am going to focus on three—Gregory Trianosky, Phillip Montague, and Alfred Archer—because they provide a clear framework with which other thinkers can be engaged as well. I will make a few brief remarks concerning each of these three before going into more detail. Gregory Trianosky argues that although an act may be supererogatory, there may still be instances when a person is blameworthy for not performing it. This runs counter to the traditional conception of supererogation, for if an act is not required, an agent is not obligated to perform the act. After all, if there is no moral obligation, then how could a person be blamed for not performing the act? In order to defend this unorthodox position,

¹⁰⁵ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ed. George Sher (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001), 20.

¹⁰⁶ “Direct” is emphasized because I will take time to argue why character has not received the attention it deserves in relation to supererogation. As I will argue in chapter four, character is of great importance to supererogation though not directly.

¹⁰⁷ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 20.

Trianosky makes a distinction between two types of negative moral judgment. As will be shown, the distinction brings “less-than-virtuous” motives to the forefront¹⁰⁸ while also providing support for my earlier claim that character should play no part in act classification. For these reasons, his argument is important to consider.

Phillip Montague begins with the accurate observation, “Now, it seems to me that, as supererogation is commonly understood by philosophers, judgments of supererogation are *act* assessments.”¹⁰⁹ He then argues against what he calls the “standard” definition of supererogation that in his opinion allows for certain acts to be erroneously classified as supererogatory even though the agent “acts at his own convenience and solely for his own enjoyment.”¹¹⁰ Montague presents a revised definition of supererogation and argues that what is important when classifying an act is not only the act, but whether the person performs the act in a praiseworthy manner. This treatment of supererogation is novel due to the fact that Montague is relocating the praiseworthy assessment from the act to the agent. As with Trianosky, this is an important move and deserves further treatment.

Also of great relevance to this topic is the view of Alfred Archer. He makes a significant distinction between *intentions* and *motivations*. From there, he proceeds to argue that it is not motive, but the intentions of the agent that should play an important part in classifying an act. Unlike Montague who does not make this distinction, Archer argues that an act can be supererogatory even though the agent’s motivation is completely self-centered. Because most moral philosophers like Montague have not made the subtle distinction between intentions and motivations, few if any moral philosophers have made the audacious claim that a person could supererogate while being selfishly motivated.

¹⁰⁸ Gregory Trianosky, “Wrongdoing, and Vice: On the Autonomy of the Ethics of Virtue,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1996): 29.

¹⁰⁹ Montague, “Acts, Agents, and Supererogation,” 102.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

Other moral philosophers have written on this topic. It is my intent to introduce some of them while focusing on the ideas of Trianosky, Montague, and Archer. These three provide a good framework within which other related ideas and thinkers can be presented. An appropriate place to begin is to ask, “Is supererogation intrinsic to the act or not? If so, then the intent, motive, and character of the agent is logically excluded from the stock of relevant material to be considered in supererogatory classification. If supererogation is not intrinsic to an act, then the internal world of the agent might be of classificatory significance after all. Montague writes: “Is supererogation a feature of actions, or a feature of persons, or is it perhaps a complex feature of actions and persons?”¹¹¹ If supererogation is more than a feature of just acts, it seems that this would have at least something to do with intents, motives, or character.

As previously mentioned, Trianosky argues that while an act may be supererogatory, there still may be instances when a person is blameworthy for not performing it. This goes against the traditional view. In both the threefold and fourfold classificatory theories, blame can only be assigned to an agent under one of two conditions: (1) the person failed to do their duty, or (2) the person performed an act that is morally wrong. The reason for this is straightforward. In the first instance, there is an obligation to perform the act. In the second instance, there is an obligation to refrain from performing the act. In both cases, blameworthiness results from a person not satisfying their moral obligation. Trianosky’s argument is interesting because he argues that blame can be assigned in instances where there is no moral obligation. He begins by highlighting what he labels a “putatively puzzling phenomenon.”¹¹² In a nutshell, if there is such a thing as a supererogatory act whose “performance is recommended but not required and whose omission is permitted rather than forbidden,”¹¹³ then why do people feel the need to offer excuses when challenged to behave in a supererogatory manner? Susan Hale also believes that it is not insignificant that people make excuses to justify the

¹¹¹ Ibid., 101.

¹¹² Trianosky, “Wrongdoing, and Vice,” 28.

¹¹³ Ibid., 27.

omission of an allegedly supererogatory deed. She goes as far as to claim that this is one of two reasons why the supererogatory classification must be abandoned. She writes: “The first phenomenon inconsistent with the *standard deontic classification*¹¹⁴ is that we give excuses for failing to perform purportedly supererogatory acts and we distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate, adequate and inadequate, excuses for such failures.”¹¹⁵ Without going into much detail, Hale argues that the moral life is fraught with conflict between duties. Relying upon Kant’s distinction between perfect and imperfect duties, she suggests that in situations where one imperfect duty comes into conflict with another, the act that is considered “more onerous to ourselves” is typically the one that is *erroneously* classified as supererogatory. In other words, when I am confronted with a situation where two imperfect duties conflict, the more demanding of the two is viewed as supererogatory because I could have performed the less demanding act without committing a moral wrong. To choose the more arduous course of action when it is not required is viewed as supererogatory. But Hale believes this is wrong. Although a person chooses the more onerous option of the two imperfect duties, they are still duties. And for her, this is why excuse-making is so insightful. When someone is faced with a conflict of two imperfect duties, no matter which is chosen, they cannot avoid neglecting the demands of the imperfect duty not chosen. This is why a person makes excuses; they know as well as others that a duty was neglected. For Hale, subsuming the allegedly supererogatory deed under the banner of the more onerous imperfect duty is able to better accommodate the psychological impulse and behavioral tendency to make excuses.

Trianosky does not see in the act of excuse-making a refutation of supererogation itself. Rather, he makes an important distinction between *negative deontic* and *negative arataic judgments* of the person. In his view,

¹¹⁴ Italics mine. Hale believed that at the time of her writing, the standard view in moral philosophy was pro-supererogation. When Urmson wrote in the 1950s, he believed that the view that had been endorsed either explicitly or implicitly by moral philosophers did not allow for supererogation. The term “standard” is relative. Urmson would have described the threefold classification system as “standard” whereas Hale was doing the opposite.

¹¹⁵ Hale, “Against Supererogation,” 276.

negative deontic judgments of the person “presuppose judgments about the wrongness of some particular act of the agent’s.”¹¹⁶ The person is judged blameworthy for failing to act in the appropriate manner. *Negative arataic judgments* are directed toward the internal world of the agent and are aimed at the one of the following: (1) the “viciousness of standing traits or dispositions,” or (2) the “viciousness of occurrent motives or states.”¹¹⁷ Trianosky believes that the latter type of *negative arataic judgment* is most relevant for supererogation. With this conceptual division between negative deontic and arataic judgments, he has what he needs to explain the excuse-making phenomenon in relation to supererogation without abandoning the classification altogether (as Hale did). He writes, “If an act is supererogatory, then, I suppose, no negative *deontic* judgments can appropriately be made of the person who fails to perform it.”¹¹⁸ He continues, “But it does not follow that no negative *arataic* judgment can appropriately be made; for the agent may still have acted from a less-than-virtuous motive, or it seems, even a vicious motive.”¹¹⁹ So while a person might not have acted wrongly in refraining from a supererogatory deed, their reason for omitting the act might be blameworthy. Concerning this point by Trianosky, Gregory Mellema writes: “Reacting with total indifference to the needs of others when refraining from an act of supererogation is quite different from reacting with feelings of regret and concern for those one fails to assist when electing not to perform an act of supererogation.”¹²⁰ This explains why one might make an excuse for not performing a supererogatory act; the individual may be deflecting blame directed at their character or motive. If this is the case, then contra Hale, an individual may offer an excuse for a supererogatory omission in order to prevent others from thinking negatively about *them* (as opposed to the mere act). In conclusion, the significance of this line of argument is threefold. First,

¹¹⁶ Trianosky, “Wrongdoing, and Vice,” 28.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 29–30.

¹²⁰ Gregory Mellema, “Moral Ideals and Virtue Ethics,” *The Journal of Ethics* 14, no. 2 (2010): 178.

Trianosky suggests the unorthodox idea that there *are* situations where a person is blameworthy for omitting a supererogatory deed. Because blameworthiness is not traditionally associated with supererogation, his view is valuable. Secondly, contra Hale, he provides a sound, alternative response to the phenomenon of excuse-making that preserves the category of supererogation. And third, though he does not seem to argue that motive can affect the classification of an act, he does give *motive* a much more important place in the supererogatory discussion. This is important because other thinkers will take this a step further and actually argue that motives and intents can actually affect the classification of an act.

As previously mentioned, Montague begins with the observation that “as supererogation is commonly understood by philosophers, judgments of supererogation are *act* assessments.” Definitions that follow this line of thinking are what he refers to as “standard” and essentially depict an act of supererogation as one that satisfies the following three criteria: (1) has moral value, (2) not required, and (3) not forbidden. This standard definition, or act-assessment version of supererogation, can more properly be expressed as: “if x is praiseworthy for doing y, the y is morally valuable and not prohibited; if y is morally valuable, is not prohibited, *and is not required*, then (and only then) y is supererogatory.” Essentially, this definition states that an agent is praiseworthy for performing the act so long as all three criteria are satisfied. Notice that there is no reference to the internal world of the agent. This approach treats supererogation as if it is intrinsic to the act; no other feature is relevant to its classification. But Montague strongly objects to this approach when he writes, “But something is surely missing from this account of supererogation.”¹²¹ In defense of this claim, he provides a scenario where a person performs an act that satisfies all three criteria for supererogation but does so “at his own convenience and solely for his own enjoyment.”¹²² For Montague, there is a significant problem with the standard definition because

¹²¹ Montague, “Acts, Agents, and Supererogation,” 102.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 102.

it leaves room for this act to be classified as supererogatory even though its performance is not praiseworthy (due to the selfish motivation of the agent). But, as he makes clear, this is problematic because it “conflicts with the idea that supererogation and praiseworthiness are *necessarily* connected.”¹²³ The fact that the standard definition allows for this is reason enough to reject it. What is needed, according to Montague, is a different definition that acknowledges the intuitively necessary connection between supererogation and praiseworthiness. In place of the standard or act-assessment definition of supererogation, he writes: “y is supererogatory (for x) if and only if x is praiseworthy for doing y (from which it follows that y is morally valuable and not prohibited), and y is not required.”¹²⁴ Although the difference seems subtle at first glance, it is extremely important.

This new definition reassigns the object to which praiseworthiness is attached. The standard definition makes the mistake of viewing praiseworthiness as an assessment of an act. In other words, if an act fulfills all three criteria, it is praiseworthy. However, Montague writes that “judgments of blameworthiness and of praiseworthiness are assessments of persons as agents.”¹²⁵ Therefore, praiseworthiness is something different than *moral value* because it is a feature of persons whereas moral value is a feature of acts. With the separation of these two assessments, Montague can now claim that an act can possess moral value while not being performed in a supererogatory manner. In these instances, the act would not be classified as supererogatory. The revised definition states, “y is supererogatory (for x) if and only if x is praiseworthy for doing y...” Even though the act has moral value and is neither required nor forbidden, x did not perform y in a praiseworthy manner, and in the new formulation, this is enough to deny the deed supererogatory status. Before, the act was considered praiseworthy if it satisfied the following three criteria: (1) possesses moral worth, (2) is not obligatory, and (3) is not forbidden. Now, the “quality of the motives” plays an

¹²³ Ibid., 105.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 105.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 102.

important role in the classification of an act. This was only made possible by making the distinction between *moral value* and *praiseworthiness*. With praiseworthiness now being a judgment of a person's motives and not an act, Montague can call an act *morally good* and yet still deny it supererogatory status if it is not performed in an appropriate manner. Thus, motive becomes an essential ingredient in the concept of supererogation.

Over the past ten years, few moral philosophers have written more on supererogation than Alfred Archer. Interestingly, he makes the provocative claim contrary to Montague that motive does *not* matter in relation to supererogation. *Prima facie*, this seems wrong. How could someone perform a deed while caring nothing for anyone else and yet the act still qualifies as supererogatory? To argue this point, Archer makes a clear distinction between motives and intentions. This distinction is not always made in moral philosophy. For example, Jackson writes:

Compare, Peterfreund asks, two doctors who each choose to go to the plague city to work. Assume one of them is motivated by a spirit of adventure. This adventurous doctor leaves behind a practice of seriously ill and dependent patients. The other physician is animated by a desire to mitigate suffering caused by the plague. This second doctor abandons a practice of wealthy hypochondriacs. Only this second doctor passes the test of altruistic intention.¹²⁶

Jackson uses the words "motivated" and "intention" interchangeably, suggesting that he makes no distinction between the two. In one essay, Gregory Mellema appears to conflate the terms as well. Following three examples of supererogation that he offers, he writes:

it is important in situations of this type to assume that people under consideration behave with good or honorable intentions. For example, one might refrain from making public certain facts about an adversary only because one fears retaliation or because one is not sufficiently resourceful to know how to do so without appearing exploitative. If so, one's refraining is probably not sufficiently meritorious to qualify as an

¹²⁶ Jackson, "The Nature of Supererogation," 294; Sheldon Peterfreund, "On the Relationship Between Supererogation and Basic Duty," *The Personalist* 59, no. 1 (1978): 54–55.

act of supererogation. Thus, in each of the scenarios it is to be assumed that the people are virtuous in their motives and underlying character.¹²⁷

In this excerpt, Mellema seems to say that “good or honorable intentions” are synonymous with virtuous motives. No distinction is made. When motivation and intention are so treated, then any view that wants to *include* the inner world of the agent when classifying an act must require that the agent’s motive is altruistic. But Archer believes that this is overly restrictive. After all, a person could risk life and limb with the intention of saving a child while being egotistically motivated to appear brave, gain fame, or feel better about oneself. Even with mixed or impure motives, surely this act is still supererogatory according to Archer. The claim that the *intentional* act to save the child in the face of great danger is *not* supererogatory because of the agent’s motive is a “counterintuitive result” according to Archer.¹²⁸ Motivation should not count so long as the agent’s intention was altruistic. Archer provides the following example:

Suppose a power-hungry misanthrope is standing for election as mayor. She wants to be mayor so she can more effectively enact her evil plans. Our election candidate passes a river and hears a drowning child scream for help. She recognizes that saving the child is likely to win her some votes in the forthcoming election. The candidate can be said to be acting with altruistic intent, securing the child’s safety is crucial to her plan of securing the townspeople’s votes. Her motives though are not altruistic.¹²⁹

Archer points out that for many philosophers, this act cannot be supererogatory because the motive of the agent is not praiseworthy. Montague, whose *agent-supererogation* view was just discussed, would agree with this assessment because it recognizes the role of motivation in the classification of the act. However, Archer denies that motivation plays a role and argues that the misanthrope’s act is in fact supererogatory because her

¹²⁷ Gregory Mellema, “Supererogation and Business Ethics,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (1991): 193.

¹²⁸ Archer makes this point by adapting the real-life account of Wesley Autrey’s heroic deed. See Alfred Archer, “Supererogation and Intentions of the Agent,” *Philosophia* 41, no. 2 (2013): 453.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 450.

intent was altruistic whereas her motive was not. But this begs the question, “Why should *intention* be considered rather than *motivation*?” To support his position, Archer refers to the last two parts of David Heyd’s quadripartite definition of supererogation. According to Heyd, two of the four necessary conditions of supererogation are: (1) “It is morally good, both by virtue of its (intended) consequences...” and (2) “It is done voluntarily for the sake of someone else’s good, and is thus meritorious.”¹³⁰ To further explain these two conditions, Heyd writes:

The intention must be *altruistic* meaning that the act must be conceived as benefiting another person (or persons). . . . Altruistic intention should not, however, be confused with altruistic motive. While intention forms part of the description of the act, the motive is only the “feeling” which moves us to do it. The motives for acting supererogatorily are diverse in character, and are not always virtuous. One may act heroically in order to gain fame, to soothe one’s conscience (haunted by guilt feelings), or out of moral self-indulgence. High-minded motives are not a necessary condition for supererogatory action. . . . Although the *motives* of supererogatory acts may be self-regarding, the *intention* must be other-regarding.¹³¹

The basic idea is that if the agent would have had a different motive, it is still possible that they would have performed the same deed.¹³² However, if the agent would have had a different intention, they would not have performed the same act.¹³³ This suggests that while intentions are an integral part of the fabric of an act, motivation is not. Therefore it is intention, not motive, that should be taken into account when classifying acts.

After Archer argues his case, he separates himself from Heyd. Archer argues that Heyd’s *altruistic intention requirement* (AIR) for supererogation is too restrictive. In place of this, Archer proposes the *moral intention requirement* (MIR). The best way to explain the difference between the two and why Archer believes in the latter’s superiority is to begin with one of his examples. He writes:

¹³⁰ Heyd, *Supererogation*, 115.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹³² Jackson, “The Nature of Supererogation,” 451.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 451.

Simon Wiesenthal was a Holocaust survivor. After The Second World War, he dedicated his life to tracking down fugitive Nazis so they could be brought to justice. Most famously, Wiesenthal helped to track down Adolf Eichmann, leading to his capture in 1960. The reason that Wiesenthal dedicated his life to this cause was not vengeance but justice. By choosing to spend his life in this way Wiesenthal put himself in a position where he would have to suffer both physical attacks from neo-Nazis and the emotional pain of constantly reliving his traumatic experiences. It seems to me that Wiesenthal's actions should be classed as supererogatory.¹³⁴

Archer asks the reader to assume that Wiesenthal's intent was to bring about justice rather than to benefit anyone. Under this assumption, his intent is not necessarily altruistic, which according to AIR, eliminates the possibility of the related acts being supererogatory. But Archer believes that this conclusion is mistaken and a consequence of the overdemandingness of AIR. What is needed is a theory of supererogation that allows intentions to play a significant role in act classification without blocking certain acts from supererogatory consideration simply because they may not be intended to benefit anyone. In place of AIR, Archer presents his view that, "For an act to be supererogatory the agent must be acting with moral intentions."¹³⁵ Unlike AIR, Wiesenthal's acts can be classified as supererogatory under the MIR theory of supererogation because his intent to bring justice is *moral*. The strength of this view is that the *moral* as opposed to the *altruistic* requirement is not nearly as rigorous. Many would agree with Archer that Wiesenthal's acts possess moral worth but require too much of him to be considered a duty. But this would mean that under AIR, the act must now be classified as either a duty, moral wrong, or merely permissible act since it cannot be classified as supererogatory since the intention is not clearly altruistic. For Archer, this conclusion is preposterous and according to Archer, is a strong reason for favoring MIR over AIR.

The value of this section to the overall project is key. Trianosky, Montague, Heyd, Jackson, Archer, and a host of other moral philosophers

¹³⁴ Archer, "Supererogation and Intentions," 455.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 457.

believe that the internal world of the agent is of great importance to supererogation. Motives and intentions are not to be dismissed in favor of a more objective definition of supererogation that discounts what is happening in the mind of the agent when the act is performed. This is of particular importance to the treatment of supererogation within Protestant theology and practice for the straightforward reason that Jesus Christ himself places emphasis upon the internal world of the agent at the time of action. Stanley Grenz writes:

The Jewish religious leaders were quite happy to content themselves with outward acts. They believed that God requires meticulous conformity to the standards of conduct set forth in the law. Jesus, however, was unwilling to stop with outward conduct. Instead his teaching pierced to the core, to the inward dimension of human existence. . . . Jesus was primarily concerned about character, motivation and the heart.¹³⁶

In the *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus took time to teach about generosity, prayer, and fasting. In all three cases, he did not merely emphasize the right course of action, but rather, the motive behind the act. Regarding generosity, he urged his listeners not to give for the purpose of earning the praise of other human beings.¹³⁷ In relation to prayer, he taught that it was wrong in the eyes of God to pray in order to be noticed by people whether that be in the synagogues or on the street corners.¹³⁸ And last, he taught that when fasting, you should be careful to “put oil on your head and wash your face” so that no one notices.¹³⁹ The crux of his teaching in this portion of the sermon was that if one wants their acts of generosity, prayer, and fasting to be approved in the eyes of God, then they must give, pray, and fast for God and not to gain the praise of people. In other words, motives matter in regard to how an act is viewed, or *classified*, in the eyes of God. What I find particularly interesting is that although Heyd’s division between motivation and intention and Archer’s argument for MIR over AIR are quite valuable in moral philosophy, it is not clear how their insights can

¹³⁶ Stanley Grenz, *The Moral Quest* (Leicester: Apollos, 1997), 108.

¹³⁷ Matt. 6:2.

¹³⁸ Matt. 6:5.

¹³⁹ Matt. 6:17.

be accommodated within Protestant ethics due to Jesus' emphasis upon right motivation. It might be the case that if there is a possibility for supererogation within Protestant ethics, an account that prioritizes motivation (as opposed to intention) such as Montague's *agent-supererogation* might be more congruous with the teachings of Jesus than accounts that make intention the focal point. This will receive great attention in chapter four. For now, I only make brief mention of Jesus' emphasis on motivation to highlight the fact that the treatment of motivation and intention within supererogation literature in moral philosophy is of great importance for the effective treatment of supererogation within Protestant ethics.

Supererogation and Christianity

Since Urmson's landmark essay in 1958, the concept of supererogation has received little attention from outside moral philosophy. This point might not seem all that significant until one is confronted with the fact that "Christian theology is the origin both of the concept and of the formulation of the problem of supererogation."¹⁴⁰ David Heyd's chapter, "The Theological Origins in Christianity" and Gregory Mellema's chapter, "Theism and Supererogation" do a splendid job discussing the origin of the term *supererogation*, the importance of the concept to Roman Catholic theology and practice, and the reasons why Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, John Calvin, and other Reformers so vehemently rejected the doctrine.¹⁴¹ However, though Heyd and Mellema provide an excellent account of the history of supererogation, it is still fitting that I touch on certain aspects of this history in this section in order to provide context for the theological orientation of this project.

The first time the word *supererogation* appears is in the *Parable of the Good Samaritan* in the Vulgate, which is a Latin translation of the Bible.¹⁴² After the Good Samaritan had brought the beaten man to the inn, he gave two

¹⁴⁰ Heyd, *Supererogation*, 15.

¹⁴¹ Heyd, *Supererogation*, 15–34; Mellema, *Beyond the Call*, 43–67.

¹⁴² Heyd, "Supererogation."

denarii to the innkeeper and said, “Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.”¹⁴³ The “whatever more” is the Latin “quodcumque supererogaveris.” The word *supererogare* from which the phrase *quodcumque supererogaveris* comes means “to overspend or spend more than is required.”¹⁴⁴ Interestingly, while this is the first time the word occurs, it would be a mistake to interpret this occurrence as an unequivocal endorsement of supererogation in Protestant ethics. Rather, as Heyd points out, the way that the term is used in this instance has “no special meaning beyond what it literally expresses.”¹⁴⁵ The Good Samaritan is simply telling the innkeeper that if the two denarii proves insufficient, that he will cover the additional costs upon his return. Ulla Wessels disagrees. She writes:

Although the expression ‘whatever more you spend’ (in Latin: ‘quodcumque supererogaveris’) only refers to the expenses of the innkeeper, the Church Fathers agreed that in essence the story is about the efforts of the Good Samaritan. By giving the innkeeper two silver coins and declaring his willingness to reimburse him for any extra expenses, the Good Samaritan did more good than could be asked of him. According to the Church Fathers, he was following not only the Ten Commandments, but also what they called ‘consilia’, the divine instructions to saints, which go beyond the Ten Commandments.¹⁴⁶

By “Church Fathers,” Wessels includes a footnote that references Saint Augustine’s *De sancta virginitate* (i.e., *Of Holy Virginity*). However, this appears to be misleading for two reasons. First of all, she only mentions Saint Augustine though she writes, “Church Fathers,” which is plural. Secondly—and of more significance—Augustine does not interact directly with the story of the Good Samaritan in this work. Consequently, Wessels last statement is misleading (though I am not implying that this is intentional on her part) because it implies that Augustine is the one that claims that the Good Samaritan’s act is “consilia.” However, he does not do this in *De sancta virginitate*. Therefore, it is not clear why Wessels is referring to this work unless

¹⁴³ Luke 10:35.

¹⁴⁴ Mellema, *Beyond the Call*, 45.

¹⁴⁵ Heyd, *Supererogation*, 17.

¹⁴⁶ Ulla Wessels, “Beyond the Call of Duty: The Structure of a Moral Region,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 77 (2015): 87.

she is simply making the more general point that Augustine does distinguish between “praecepti” (i.e., precepts, or commands) and “consilia” (i.e., counsels).¹⁴⁷ The bottom line is that Wessel needs to say much more in order to support the claim that the Church Fathers believed that the Good Samaritan’s promise to repay whatever more the innkeeper spends is an example of a counsel. Therefore, Heyd’s position that the Samaritan’s act is not necessarily a case of supererogation deserves consideration.

Heyd’s counterpoint is enough to show that the matter is not clear and that there is reason to be reluctant when attempting to classify the Good Samaritan’s act as supererogatory. This is not to say that acts of supererogation are not possible within Protestant ethics, but rather, if they are, the Good Samaritan’s act might not be the perfect example of supererogation that some have thought. Besides, does the passage not conclude with a command (i.e., “Go and do likewise.”¹⁴⁸)? If this be the case, then support for acts of supererogation in Protestant ethics must come from elsewhere. Considering this, I will later present what I believe is one of the clearest acts of supererogation in the New Testament in chapter three.

The first systematic treatment of *supererogation* can be traced back to the writings of Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae*. He writes, “The difference between a counsel and a precept lies in this, that a precept implies

¹⁴⁷ Interestingly, Luke 10:35 (“The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’”) is listed as a footnote to the following statement by Augustine in *De sancta virginitate*: “In these the Lord lays an obligation on you, whereas in the first whatever you add over and above he will on his return repay you.” Prior to this statement, he is comparing the following three injunctions: (a) “Thou shalt not marry,” (b) “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” and (c) “Thou shalt not kill.” He groups (b) and (c) together and says that while they are “demanded of us,” (a) is not because it is “over and above.” Therefore, according to Saint Augustine, choosing to remain celibate for the sake of the “kingdom of heaven” can only be “freely offered” and is therefore a counsel, or act of supererogation. However, this footnote mentioning Luke 10:35 has been added by the editor and does not represent a reference by Augustine to the Good Samaritan. See Saint Augustine, *De sancta virginitate*, in *De bono coniugali and De sancta virginitate*, trans. and ed. P.G. Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 105.

¹⁴⁸ Luke 10:37.

necessity, while a counsel is left to the choice of the one to whom it is given.”¹⁴⁹

He continues:

The precepts of the new law, then, must be understood as bearing on whatever is necessary in order to reach the end of eternal blessedness, with which the New Law puts us in immediate contact. Counsels, on the other hand, have to be concerned with better and more expeditious ways by which man can reach this end.¹⁵⁰

Aquinas is saying that precepts (i.e. commandments) are obligatory for all agents whereas counsels are *recommended* but not *required*. Essentially, a *counsel* is an act of supererogation because although it is of great moral and spiritual value, it is neither obligatory nor forbidden. It goes above and beyond what the commandments require and gives an individual the best chance of attaining the salvation of their soul and securing an eternity with God in heaven. For Aquinas, *good works* play a crucial role in determining whether a person is justified (declared by God to be “not guilty” as well as “righteous”) before God. This *soteriological* component of good works is evident in Aquinas’ thought when he writes that fulfilling the commandments is “necessary in order to reach the end of eternal blessedness.”¹⁵¹ In other words, good works are integral to justification and therefore to salvation. As Grudem writes, “the logical consequence of this view of justification is that our eternal life with God is not based on God’s grace alone, but partially on our merit as well. . . .”¹⁵² If a person has failed to sufficiently keep the commandments or has not performed an adequate number of good works throughout the course of their life, they will be sentenced to purgatory for an indefinite time period. However, a person can have their sentence lessened through the purchase of indulgences. Aquinas’ distinction between commandments and counsels provided the “necessary theoretical justification [for] the institution of indulgences.”¹⁵³ Mellema writes:

¹⁴⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* lallae, q. 108, a. 4, vol. 30 (Oxford: Blackfriars, 1972), 61.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 61, 63.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 61.

¹⁵² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 728.

¹⁵³ Heyd, *Supererogation*, 15.

The principle underlying the idea that the purchase of an indulgence can lessen the penalties for sin was that Jesus Christ and the saints had, through their exemplary lives on earth, built up a treasury of good works. Since this treasury can be of no direct benefit to these individuals, the scheme of indulgences was devised to enable others to benefit. Those who fail to live saintly lives are assigned penalties (perhaps a period of confinement in purgatory), and through the purchase of indulgences it was believed possible for a measure of the accrued merit of Christ and the saints to be applied to their account. And when a measure of this merit is applied to the account of one faced with a penalty, the penalty is correspondingly lessened.¹⁵⁴

Through the purchase of indulgences, the superabundant merit could be transferred by the Church to those who were lacking so that one could be justified before God. Essentially, Aquinas' endorsement of counsels, or acts of supererogation, made it possible for extra credit to accumulate in the treasury of the church so that it could be dispensed to those in need if they were willing to pay the right price. In this view of justification where good works are paramount, the importance of supererogatory acts is great.

It is no wonder that Luther and the Reformers wholeheartedly rejected the possibility of supererogatory deeds. According to Luther, there is no such thing as an act that “gathers merits and good works,”¹⁵⁵ because if there were, “Christ’s blood and death [would be] denied and blasphemed, together with the Holy Ghost and the Gospel.”¹⁵⁶ Yet this is exactly what a counsel was claimed to be: *an act that produced extra merit which could then be applied to those who were lacking*. Thus, counsels—or acts of supererogation—were being used to provide theological support for selling indulgences, which was directly related to a faith-plus-works view of justification that Luther and the Reformers deemed heretical. Grudem writes, “The primary issue in the Protestant Reformation was a dispute with the Roman Catholic Church over

¹⁵⁴ Mellema, *Beyond the Call*, 44–45.

¹⁵⁵ Martin Luther, *A Treatise on Good Works*, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 44, trans. W.A. Lambert, ed. James Atkinson (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1966), 27.

¹⁵⁶ Martin Luther, “An Exhortation to the Clergy Assembled at the Diet at Augsburg 1530,” in *Works of Martin Luther*, vol. IV, trans. C.M. Jacobs (Philadelphia, PA: A.J. Holman Company, 1931), 337.

justification,”¹⁵⁷ and supererogatory deeds in the form of counsels were indispensable to the Catholic view. The Reformers did not see a way to retain supererogation while rejecting the faith-plus-works view of justification that they believed was held by Roman Catholics. With impressive insight, Mellema notes, “this line of reasoning is not perfectly airtight.”¹⁵⁸ He continues:

There is no contradiction in affirming that a person can never be judged righteous in God's eyes on the basis of works alone and affirming at the same time that a person can perform acts of supererogation. For an act whose performance fulfils no duty and is yet praiseworthy may still fall short of justifying a person in God's eyes.¹⁵⁹

This astute observation separates the question of supererogation from the hotly contested doctrine of justification. This is healthy because it opens the door to a reexamination of supererogation within a Protestant theology that remains committed to a *sola gratia, sola fide* view of justification. As Paul wrote, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”¹⁶⁰ With the possibility of supererogation decoupled from the doctrine of justification, the question can now be asked, “Are acts of supererogation possible within Protestant ethics?”

Interestingly, this question has received little attention over the past sixty years. This is ironic considering the fact that the concept of supererogation originated within Christian theology. It is also a bit peculiar that when the notion of supererogation is occasionally engaged from a theistic standpoint, the focus is not what you might expect. Rather than asking whether it is possible for a Christian to perform an act of supererogation, several philosophers have been more interested in whether it is possible for *God* to perform an act of supererogation. This a bit odd for the simple reason that the question of supererogation from the human perspective is much more relevant and therefore useful and I will defend this position in due course. After all,

¹⁵⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 722.

¹⁵⁸ Mellema, *Beyond the Call*, 52.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁶⁰ Eph. 2:8–9.

many committed Christians such as myself experience considerable *angst* in the attempt to understand our moral responsibilities in a world torn asunder with natural disasters, starvation, disease, the refugee crisis, fatherlessness, sex trafficking, the threat of global warming, the abuse of power, and the like. Bonhoeffer's words still ring true: we live in a "reality filled with concrete, ethical problems such as we have never had before in the history of the West."¹⁶¹ As Robin Lovin writes, Christians (and those who are not) are busy thinking and worrying about various issues in an effort to try and "sort out our obligations" in "search for [an] inner peace" that is attainable only when one is "giving Caesar what belongs to Caesar and giving God what belongs to God (Luke 20:20–26)."¹⁶² Nevertheless, I want to make a few brief comments concerning the discussion of God's acts and supererogation. This requires an analysis of William Alston's essay in which he appeals to the concept of supererogation in order to provide support for divine command theorists in the face of the Euthyphro dilemma. Following these comments, I will discuss two of Mark Wynn's arguments including that supererogation may not be useful within Christian theology and practice. In addition to Wynn, Gregory Mellema also treats supererogation as it relates to human behavior from a religious perspective, but his viewpoint will not be addressed until the latter half of chapter two. And last, John S. and Paul D. Feinberg heartily embrace the possibility of supererogation in Protestant theology and ethics. Although I will make a few comments regarding their remarks on supererogation following my discussion of Wynn, I will wait until chapter two and especially chapter four to interact with them fully.

Much of what has been written concerning whether God can perform an act of supererogation is in response to an essay written by William Alston

¹⁶¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott, ed. Clifford J. Green, vol. 6 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 76.

¹⁶² Robin W. Lovin, *Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 10.

in 1990 titled “Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists.”¹⁶³ In order to understand the place of supererogation in his argument, a little explanation is required. Alston’s main objective was to show how divine command theorists could avoid being impaled on either horn of the Euthyphro dilemma. As he states, “The original dilemma in the *Euthyphro* had to do with whether an act is pious because it is loved by the gods or is it loved by the gods because it is pious.”¹⁶⁴ The second option must be rejected for the obvious reason that if an act is holy (i.e., right) due to some standard that is external to and thus independent from God, then there is something “above” God to which he must submit. This challenges the orthodox position within Christian theology that God is ontologically prior and superior to everything and the source of anything and everything good. However, the first horn of the Euthyphro dilemma is equally problematic. If the *moral good* is nothing more than what God commands, it seems that his commands are completely arbitrary. Building on this point, Alston writes:

Anything that God should decide to command would *thereby* be obligatory. If God should command us to inflict pain on each other gratuitously we would thereby be obliged to do so. More specifically, the theory renders divine commands arbitrary because it blocks off any more reason for them. God can’t command us to do A because that is what is morally right; for it doesn’t become morally right until He commands it.¹⁶⁵

According to Alston, the only way to avoid this dilemma is to first establish that moral *goodness* is distinct from moral *obligation* and secondly, that God himself is “the supreme standard of goodness.”¹⁶⁶ Working from the assumption that God is *essentially perfectly good*, Alston writes:

If God is essentially perfectly good, then it is metaphysically impossible that God should do anything that is less than supremely good; and this

¹⁶³ This quickly becomes obvious when reading the following article: Alfred Archer, “Divine Moral Goodness, Supererogation, and The Euthyphro Dilemma,” *International Journal of the Philosophy of Religion* 79 (2016): 150–154.

¹⁶⁴ William Alston, “Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists,” in *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy*, ed. Michael D. Beaty (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 304.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 305.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 319.

includes the moral good as well as other modes of goodness. If it is morally better to be loving than to be indifferent and morally better to love everyone than to be agapistically selective, it will be metaphysically impossible for God to display indifference or partiality.¹⁶⁷

Because it is metaphysically impossible for God to act in a manner that is inconsistent with his character, he can only behave in a way that is perfectly good. Due to this divine fact, Alston reasons that “moral obligations [do] not attach to God” because “We can say that a person ought to do *A* only where there is, or could be, some resistance on her part to doing *A*.”¹⁶⁸ Because God is wholly good, he experiences no resistance. Therefore, any term from the “ought family” is not applicable to God. This leaves us with an image of an *essentially perfectly good* God who has no moral obligations. Alston writes:

In suggesting that God is perfectly good, morally as well as otherwise, even though He is not subject to obligations, we are presupposing a fundamental distinction between value or goodness, including moral goodness, on the one hand, and the likes of duty, obligation, and ought, on the other.¹⁶⁹

In support of this *fundamental distinction*, Alston invokes the *phenomenon of supererogation* which he describes as “widely but not universally accepted.”¹⁷⁰ In the concept of supererogation we are able to see that most people already make the important distinction between the moral good and moral obligation. After all, one who believes that acts of supererogation are possible embraces the view that an act can be morally good without it being obligatory. Thus, this widely accepted concept provides support for Alston’s suggestion that we divide between the moral good and moral obligation so that we can say of God that although he is bound by no moral obligation, he can still perform acts that are morally good. This is only possible if the two are divided. This paves the way for the divine command theorist to evade the first horn of the Euthyphro dilemma because if the moral good is separate from the moral obligations that

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 307–308.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 307.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 311.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 312.

result from divine commands, then the commands are no longer arbitrary so long as they are grounded in the moral good.

According to Alston, this line of reasoning would allow the divine command theorist to say that while God's commands are the source of human moral obligations, God's *essential perfect goodness* is the source of the commandments. Archer writes of Alston's view:

On this account, then, moral goodness pre-exists moral obligation but does not pre-exist God. It is features of God that determine what is morally good and God's commands that determine what is morally obliged. This account allows us to give an independent standard for moral goodness whilst giving God a central role in morality.¹⁷¹

For example, under this view *loving another person* is not morally good because God commands it. Rather, loving another person is morally good because God is a God of love. Therefore, out of his loving nature, God commands people to love one another. The command simply flows out of that nature. While God's commands give rise to obligation, his character determines what type of commands will be given in the first place. In this view, God is not some moral *tabula rasa* issuing decrees in an otherwise nihilistic universe. Instead, God's nature is the source of all goodness including moral goodness and therefore, the commands are given to guide people morally in a way that is reflective of this divine goodness. Alston's point is that in this view, God's commands are not at all arbitrary. If successful, Alston has shown how divine command theories can avoid both horns of the Euthyphro dilemma.¹⁷² Though important, it is his use of supererogation that is most relevant to this project. It is important to note that Alston never suggests that God performs supererogatory acts. Rather, supererogation is used simply to point out that most people already make the kind of distinction between the moral good and moral obligation that is necessary if divine command theorists are going to stand their ground in the face of the Euthyphro dilemma.

¹⁷¹ Alfred Archer, "Divine Moral Goodness, Supererogation, and The Euthyphro Dilemma," 159.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 159.

A myriad of responses followed Alston's essay. As noted by Archer, philosophers such as J.L. Lombardi, Eleonore Stump, and K. Kraay point out different problems that result from Alston's appeal to supererogation to distinguish moral goodness and obligation.¹⁷³ In response to these, Elizabeth Young argues for a new analysis of the concept of supererogation in an attempt to defend Alston's position.¹⁷⁴ I will not go into detail explaining the various responses to Alston because the discussion would take us off course. As stated earlier, whether God can supererogate is not the focus of this project. However, it has been important to say something about Alston's position because it is one of the rare instances in the last 70 years that supererogation has been treated from a religious perspective.

Like Alston and the group of philosophers that responded to him, Mark Wynn is interested in supererogation from a religious perspective. However, he distinguishes himself from the group just mentioned by focusing on supererogation from a human standpoint. His focus is twofold: (1) the *usefulness* of supererogation for mapping the relationship between a religious and secular ethic, and (2) whether *supererogation* is of any use when examining and discussing the more mature stages of Christian faith. In examining this topic, he discusses Thomas Aquinas' view of infused moral virtues as well as John of the Cross's active and passive phases of the spiritual life. The latter subject is of particular importance because Wynn suggests that according to John of the Cross, concepts such as *obligatory* and *supererogatory* may "no longer [have] any ready application in the experience of the spiritual adept"¹⁷⁵ following the dark night of the soul.

To begin with, Wynn discusses Aquinas' thought pertaining to the difference between the acquired and infused forms of temperance as well as Aquinas' treatment of the virtue of charity. Wynn draws an important distinction between the *rule of reason* which governs secular ethics and *divine rule* which

¹⁷³ Ibid., 153.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 153; See Elizabeth D. Young, "God's Moral Goodness and Supererogation," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 73 (2013): 90–95.

¹⁷⁵ Wynn, "Supererogation and the Relationship," 177.

governs religious ethics. The two are not in competition with one another. However, the divine rule “can only be grasped by reference to a theological context”¹⁷⁶ and “involves a more stringent standard of conduct.”¹⁷⁷ While a religious ethic will include that which is required by the rule of reason, it also will supersede it. For example, when trying to judge the appropriate measure of food to consume (not too much or too little, i.e., *temperance*), the *rule of reason* prescribes a “kind of dietary practice that is suited to the preservation of bodily health, and the exercise of reason.”¹⁷⁸ Notice that no appeal to revelation is necessary. However, regarding *infused* temperance, what is required is much more demanding. Here Wynn quotes Aquinas: “[the] divine rule requires that a man should *chastise his body and bring it into subjection* [1 Cor. 9:27] . . . by abstinence in food, drink, and the like.”¹⁷⁹ When compared with the desert fathers, Aquinas’ dietary regime could be regarded as moderate. However, this goes far beyond the moderation that the rule of reason requires for the attainment and sustaining of physical and mental health. Because the goal of obeying the divine rule is to be properly related to God now and in eternity, this stricter standard is meaningful. However, if you attempted to make sense of this more stringent standard through the lens of reason outside of any reference to a theological context, you would fail. After all, according to the rule of reason, temperance requires that measure of food that is conducive to health. But beyond this, the more difficult requirement of abstinence seems unnecessary (as opposed to supererogatory) from the vantage point of the rule of reason. Wynn writes:

But the divine rule is at the same time more demanding. So if we are viewing matters from the vantage point of the relevant rule of reason, it seems we should say that the dietary practices that are required by the divine rule, in so far as they exceed those that are required by the rule of reason, are morally permissible (because they involve no harm of the body), but undermotivated (because they are more stringent, and yet do no more to realise the goal of the rule of reason). If that is so, then

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 177.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 166.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 165.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 165; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 63, a. 4, ed. T. Gilby (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964–1974).

from the vantage point of the rule of reason, abstinence [from food, drink and the like] will not be meritorious, and so will not be supererogatory.¹⁸⁰

In a nutshell, the more stringent requirement is permissible, but does not contribute anything extra toward reaching the goal of the rule of reason (i.e., health). Thus, the more stringent requirement is not supererogatory, but only morally permissible. However, from the perspective of divine rule, this is not so. In other words, the introduction of the theological context does not shift the boundary between obligation and supererogation from the perspective of the rule of reason. If anything, the theological context gives moral value to actions that would otherwise be superfluous.

Next, Wynn turns his attention to the virtue of charity. Although he admits that Aquinas does not present an “acquired” version of the virtue of charity in contrast to *neighbor love*, he does believe that a distinction can be made in Aquinas’ thought between the requirements of *other regard* (subject to the rule of reason) and the requirements of *neighbor love* (divine rule).¹⁸¹ As with the distinction between acquired and infused temperance, *infused charity* (or neighbor love as Wynn calls it) is much more demanding than *other regard* in that it requires not only doing good to others, but also having the right attitude. In other words, while one can satisfy the requirement of *other regard* by behaving in the right manner, one must in addition possess the appropriate attitude when acting in order to fulfill the requirements of neighborly love. This additional and more stringent requirement is clearly articulated in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. He writes: “And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.”¹⁸² Giving all of one’s possessions to the poor would be impressive from a moral standpoint. Nonetheless, Paul explains that the most generous deed is without value in the eyes of God if not done with an attitude of love. Wynn writes:

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 167.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 170.

¹⁸² 1 Cor. 13:3, New American Standard Bible (NASB).

. . . suppose that the corresponding rule of reason requires us not to harm others, but imposes no requirement to benefit them, unless they are in dire need, and we can relieve that need at minimal cost to ourselves. Such a rule would require me to pull a drowning child from a pool of water, if I can do so at no cost to myself, but would not require me, not even as a matter of imperfect duty, to relieve poverty that is consistent with the needy person's basic nutritional needs being met, or to relieve poverty that is life-threatening if in doing so I would have to significantly impoverish myself. Relative to such a rule, the practice of neighbour love looks to be not simply permissible, but beyond the call of duty, and meritorious, and therefore supererogatory: from the vantage point of such a rule, the person who practises neighbour love will display a deeper practical commitment to others' well-being than is required; and such behaviour therefore seems to be not under-motivated, in the way that abstinence may appear to be under-motivated relative to the relevant rule of reason, but meritorious.¹⁸³

After making this point, Wynn names three types of moral goods: (1) goods of reason, (2) theological goods, and (3) extended goods of reason. A *good of reason* is an object that results from following the rule of reason. A theological good is a good that results from following the divine rule. It is important to mention that theological goods are contingent upon God's existence¹⁸⁴ and that if God did not exist, there would be no grounds from the vantage point of the rule of reason to refer to the object as a "good." It is the third type of good that is most interesting in relation to supererogation. According to Wynn, *extended goods of reason* are those goods that result from going above and beyond what is normally required by the rule of reason. For this reason, they are not *goods of reason*. However, they also are not contingent upon God's existence¹⁸⁵ even if they first arise within a theological context. In order to better explain the uniqueness of extended goods of reason, Wynn writes:

Following our earlier account, we could say that the Samaritan's conduct realises a good of reason, in so far as it relieves the dire need of the injured man; his conduct also realises a theological good, in so far as it is congruent with the beatific vision; but in addition, his conduct realises further goods, which are neither goods of reason nor theological goods. For instance by entrusting the injured man to the innkeeper, the Samaritan not only relieves his dire need, but helps to

¹⁸³ Wynn, "Supererogation and the Relationship," 171.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 173.

ensure his full recovery. Although not a good of reason, this further of good can be seen to be good independently of any reference to theological presuppositions. It is, therefore, what I am calling an extended good of reason.¹⁸⁶

Acting to help ensure the man's full recovery is obligatory according to the divine rule. However, this act would not be required from the vantage point of the rule of reason. The rule of reason only requires that you relieve the dire need. Yet, even if a person might not subscribe to the theological beliefs that form the context from which the obligation originates, they still can recognize the *good* that is produced by the act. As is evident, *extended goods of reason* provide a common ground of sorts between a secular ethic and religious ethic. Granted, the acts from which these goods are produced are classified differently, but this does not change the fact that there is a piece of shared territory between the two that involves supererogation.

Another important point that Wynn makes is that in John of the Cross' account of the spiritual life, the concepts of obligation and supererogation may not apply to the more mature Christian. John distinguishes between the *active* and *passive* phases of the spiritual life. The active phase consists of the early stages of a person's spiritual development, which is characterized by the expenditure of significant amounts of energy in an effort to acquire virtue. A person "engages in various spiritual exercises, in order to root out disordered desires."¹⁸⁷ This could include Bible reading, study, prayer, fasting, penance, increased church attendance, periods of silence, and focused meditation. The point is that the person is working hard to resist evil, cultivate virtue, and be pleasing to God. Of these early stages, Wynn writes: "During this phase of the spiritual life, it seems easy enough to distinguish between those actions that are obligatory and those that are supererogatory."¹⁸⁸

However, according to John, there comes a point in a person's journey when God moves them from the active phase into the passive phase. This is

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 173.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 174–175.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 175.

known as the *dark night of the soul*. During this indefinite time period, a person becomes acutely aware of their own nothingness before God. This existential state of brokenness paves the way for spiritual awakening. In this new state of being, a person's "thoughts and feelings come to be governed by a new, divinely infused centre of agency."¹⁸⁹ Whereas prior to the dark night the person expended a great deal of effort to minimize vice and acquire virtue, now the person has been transformed in such a deep way that incessant striving ceases. It is not needed. A "new perceptual condition" now exists. In this new and more mature state of being, "the world conforms to a divinely ordered scale of values."¹⁹⁰ I take this to mean that due to God's mighty work to make an individual like himself, virtue and right behavior *naturally* result rather than being a product of incessant striving. One's fundamental disposition is similar to that of Christ now, and therefore, virtuous intentions, motivations, and acts effortlessly occur. In this new state, what room is there to speak of *obligation* and *supererogation*? Wynn writes:

So in the "awakened" person's experience, obligations will no longer be manifest as a constraint. In the earlier phases of the spiritual life, it is possible to have a sense of what one's duty relative to God requires, and to experience that duty as binding, or as a constraint upon action, in so far as it runs counter to the tendency of some of one's desires; but the feeling of being bound in this way can be no part of the experience of the awakened person. This is one reason for thinking that the notion of obligation, and in turn the notion of supererogation, no longer has any ready application in the experience of the spiritual adept: duty is not experienced by such a person in the way that it is experienced by the rest of us, namely, as a constraint or as binding.¹⁹¹

Basically, the awakened person does not need to be "restrained" because they possess an inner nature that disposes them to act appropriately. In other words, the concepts of obligation and supererogation are useless. As Wynn points out, it remains to be seen whether the categories of obligation and supererogation fail to apply to the mature, awakened individual or if the categories simply do not register in the person's experience though they

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 176.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 176.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 177.

technically still exist. Interesting, Hans Urs von Balthasar—a Roman Catholic theologian—suggests something similar when he writes that while acts of supererogation might be possible for “ordinary Christians” with a “worm’s eye view,” the “saint sees none of this [because] he sees how much remains to be done if he is to help to quench Christ’s thirst for love.”¹⁹² The suggestion that even if supererogation does exist in a Christian ethic, it might not be relevant, is very interesting for the simple reason that there does not seem to be a similar suggestion within moral philosophy.

Before concluding this chapter, John and Paul Feinberg are worth mentioning because they represent one of the rare occasions in Protestant ethics where supererogation is embraced. They write that supererogation is one of “three concepts [that] are very important in determining what may or may not or should or should not be done in particular situations.”¹⁹³ Using several examples, they offer instances of what they believe are supererogatory acts. Just as significant is the fact that they do not believe that what makes an act moral or immoral can be determined without reference to the inner, psychological world of the agent in the moments leading up to the performance of an act. They use the specific phrase, “motivations or intentions,” revealing their position that the two are not to be treated as synonymous when discussing the nature of an act. However, they are not quite as precise on these matters as one would hope. For example, no clear definition of motive and intent is offered, leaving the reader to wonder which they are referring to when they write that “the Lord frequently stressed that he was not interested in mere outward conformity to the law; he wanted a proper heart attitude.”¹⁹⁴ This might seem like a hair-splitting question, but it is not; one should be careful to not use these terms in a deontic context without defining them first. Although these issues will be discussed at length in chapter four, it is important to state

¹⁹² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *In the Fullness of Faith: On the Centrality of the Distinctively Catholic*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1988), 87.

¹⁹³ John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 19–20.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

that the value of their overall contribution rests with two clear affirmations: (1) supererogatory acts are possible in Protestant theology and ethics, and (2) the internal, psychological world of the agent at the time of the act (or immediately preceding its performance) must be considered in order to figure out what makes an act moral or immoral. Regarding the first contribution, I will discuss some of their examples in the next chapter, and regarding the second contribution, a few of their insights will be utilized in chapter four.

I stated earlier that the question can now be asked, “Are acts of supererogation possible within Protestant ethics?” Though Wynn’s analysis of *John of the Cross’s* account of the spiritual life suggests that acts of supererogation might not exist or even if they do, might not be useful in the life of a mature (i.e., awakened) Christian, I will argue both that there is a place for the concept and that it can be useful. As will be discussed in chapter three, one of the major areas where supererogation can be found and be of benefit is in relation to Jesus’ teaching on divorce in the Gospel of Matthew. However, this does not necessarily contradict Wynn’s thesis. It could be the case that Wynn is right but that there is still a significant place for supererogation in Christian ethics for the unfortunate reason that a large number of Christians have not passed through St. John’s dark night and had their inner nature transformed so that their every thought and desire is in line with God’s every thought and desire. In other words, there will always be less mature Christians whose nature is resistant to God’s will to some degree and who struggle to obey God. Thus, one could take the stance that my argument for supererogation in Protestant ethics is at least beneficial for less mature Christians as well as Christians who passed through the dark night but have since digressed. Regarding this attempt to strike a compromise with Wynn’s thesis, my only goal is to show that if one accepts Wynn’s thesis, this does not require them to reject mine. Both Wynn’s perspective and the one that I will set forth in this thesis are compatible.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to provide an overview of supererogation, its origin in religious thought, its recent resurgence in moral philosophy following Urmson's seminal article, and the various issues and thinkers that are either important to the development and history of the concept itself or to the overall aim of this thesis, which is to demonstrate the possibility and role of acts of supererogation in Protestant ethics. Following Mellema's pivotal insight that separates the question of supererogation from the doctrine of justification, the question can now be asked: "Are supererogatory deeds possible in Protestant ethics?"

Before moving into the heart of the thesis in chapter three where I will argue for the supererogatory classification of a specific act in the New Testament, I address a significant error in Urmson's classification of St. Francis of Assisi's preaching to the birds in chapter two. This will elucidate the fact that while several supererogatory-related concepts are shared between moral philosophy and Protestant ethics, the latter is unique because the biblical narrative is relevant when classifying acts. As Mark Wynn argues, the introduction of a theological context can affect the deontic status of an act,¹⁹⁵ and this must be taken into account when assessing acts from a Protestant perspective. This might seem too obvious to address, but considering the nature of the error that Urmson commits, it requires attention. Chapter two will conclude with a discussion of Gregory Mellema's vocation-based theory of how acts of supererogation in Protestant ethics might be accommodated and with three specific examples of supererogation proposed by John and Paul Feinberg. This will prepare the way for chapter three.

¹⁹⁵ Wynn, "Supererogation and the Relationship," 176.

§ 2. James Urmson's Failed Classification of Francis' Preaching and Gregory Mellema's Proposal

Any inquiry into the possibility of supererogation in a Christian context (i.e., Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, or Protestant) must take into account the theological narrative and corresponding beliefs that accompany the act. This is most evident with the act of forgiveness. Whereas writers such as Hagit Benjabi and David Heyd,¹ Espen Gamlund,² Cheshire Calhoun,³ J. Angelo Corlett,⁴ Howard McGary,⁵ and Neera Badhwar⁶ argue that the act of forgiving another is essentially supererogatory,⁷ the "introduction of a theological context" as Mark Wynn argues can alter the classification of this act. For example, while the act of forgiving someone for a wrong done is generally viewed as supererogatory from a secular perspective, this is most likely not the case in Protestant ethics. Concerning the act of forgiving others, Reinhold Niebuhr writes:

Forgiveness seems to be purely in the realm of grace. Yet even forgiveness comes partially into the category of love as law. For we are warned that if we forgive not men their trespasses neither will our Father forgive our trespasses. This would seem to mean that forgiveness is something we owe the erring brother as a right. Or rather it is something we owe God. . . . Usually the New Testament presents forgiveness only as a possibility for those who are of contrite heart and whose uneasy conscience has been eased by divine forgiveness. Yet the fact that it is also presented as an obligation, which will incur the punishment of judgment if left undone, proves that even on this pinnacle of grace law is not completely transcended.⁸

¹ Hagit Benjabi and David Heyd, "The Charitable Perspective: Forgiveness and Toleration as Supererogatory," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 31, no. 4 (2001): 575.

² Espen Gamlund, "Supererogatory Forgiveness," *Inquiry* 53, no. 6 (2010).

³ Cheshire Calhoun, "Changing One's Heart," *Ethics* 103, no. 1 (1992): 81.

⁴ J. Angelo Corlett, "Forgiveness, Apology, and Retributive Punishment," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (2006): 36.

⁵ Howard McGary, "Forgiveness," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (1989): 350.

⁶ Badhwar, "Justice and Supererogation," 126.

⁷ There are qualified exceptions. For example, though Espen Gamlund argues that forgiving someone for a wrong done is supererogatory when the person is not repentant, he also argues that there are times that one has a duty to forgive if the person is repentant. See Gamlund, "Supererogatory Forgiveness," 541.

⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr, "Love and Law in Protestantism and Catholicism," *The Journal of Religious Thought* 9, no. 2 (1952): 106.

Having introduced a theological context, Niebuhr makes clear that the act of forgiving is not optional and therefore cannot be supererogatory. Whereas the point that the introduction of a theological context can change the classificatory status of an act might at first appear too obvious to mention, it has been overlooked by none other than Urmson himself. I will argue in this chapter that in the landmark article “Saints and Heroes,” which launched the contemporary discussion of supererogation, Urmson *mistakenly* sets forth the religious example of Francis of Assisi’s preaching to the birds as one of his three major examples of supererogation precisely because he ignores the theological context. The chapter will then conclude with a brief summary.

In the first section of this chapter, I argue that Urmson’s classification of Francis’ preaching ultimately fails for the simple reason that his moral philosophy cannot account for what I am designating as an “individual duty.” Although the term I am proposing is unique, the concept is not. In the language of Robert Adams, there is such a thing as an act that is obligatory for only one individual. Within a Christian framework (or any theistic framework where a divine being or beings communicate to individuals), this type of duty results from a “command of God addressed to a specific individual . . .”⁹ What is needed is a deontic category for acts that are obligatory in every sense of the word for one single individual while not being so for others. Adams identifies this type of act with the concept of “vocation,”¹⁰ or “calling,”¹¹ and this is exactly what is missing in Urmson’s fourfold classificatory scheme.

In the second section of this chapter, I will present Gregory Mellema’s vocation-based argument for supererogation. Using a concept of vocation that is very similar to Adams’,¹² Mellema presents what is arguably the most

⁹ Robert Adams, “Vocation,” *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (1987): 449-450.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 450.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 451.

¹² Robert Adams refers to a “Christian ethical theory” (see Adams, “Vocation,” 448) while Mellema frames his discussion of vocation in relation to supererogation using the phrase, “Protestant concept of vocation” (see Mellema, *Beyond the Call*, 148). While Adams might have in mind something broader than a merely Protestant ethic, the concept of “vocation” that he employs is remarkably similar to the concept of “vocation” that Mellema employs. So while it is possible that Adams does not intend on his discussion of vocation to be interpreted

thorough argument for supererogation that exists in Protestant ethics. Granted, he does so by way of suggestion, but his is both a creative and insightful attempt to show how supererogation can be accommodated. In all of this, the main point I want to make is that the theological narrative that informs Francis' perspective of his act (i.e., that it is his duty) is absent in Urmson's moral framework. For this reason, Urmson is unable to correctly classify Francis' preaching to the birds because he does not take into account the metaphysical backdrop that gives Francis' act a unique quality. This is the reason that Adams' concept of vocation and Mellema's vocation-based argument is used: *to clearly show that one cannot correctly evaluate the possibility of supererogation in Protestant ethics without seriously considering the theological narrative within which the act occurs.*

Urmson's Inability to Rightly Classify Francis' *Preaching to the Birds*

When Urmson argues for the necessity of this fourth classification of supererogation, he relies heavily on examples. As previously mentioned, the two examples that have dominated the literature are that of the soldier who throws himself on a grenade to save his fellow comrades and the doctor who leaves his city of residence as well as his current practice to help the suffering in a plague-ridden city not his own. Another of Urmson's examples—Francis of Assisi's preaching to the birds—has received far less attention than the other two. This may be due in part to the fact that the Francis example introduces religion into the discussion, which might be perceived by moral philosophers as unnecessarily cumbersome for Urmson's thesis. Christopher Cowley affirms this point while addressing another topic: "the saint raises special complications not only because of her religious beliefs, but also because of her conception of morality in religious terms . . ." ¹³

as a solely Protestant concept, it harmonizes with Mellema's concept, which is designated "Protestant."

¹³ Christopher Cowley, "The Agents, Acts and Attitudes of Supererogation," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement 77* (2015): 10.

Although Urmson presents Francis' preaching to the birds as a paradigm case of supererogation, it is not. I will argue the following by way of a principle of analytic ontology known as the Identity of Indiscernibles (which will be explained shortly): (1) if God did not command Francis to preach to the birds, then Francis' act was morally indifferent and must be classified as *permissible* rather than supererogatory; (2) if we assume for the sake of argument that the Christian God *did* command Francis' preaching to the birds, then it will be shown that the act cannot be subsumed under any category in the fourfold classificatory scheme; and finally, (3) another classificatory category is needed to accurately classify this type of act from a moral perspective. Regarding this last point, Mellema's argument along with Robert Adams' discussion of the notion of vocation in Christian ethical theory will be utilized with an eye towards further demonstrating why Urmson cannot rightly classify Francis' preaching to the birds. It is important to note that this is not necessarily an argument for or against supererogation within Protestant ethics. My task is more humble; I only want to show that neither the threefold classificatory scheme that Urmson rejects, nor the fourfold classificatory scheme he proposes, is adequate to accommodate a particular type of act within Christian practice of which Francis' preaching to the birds is an example.

To accomplish these three objectives, the first section has been divided into the following subsections, the first two serving to lay the groundwork for the argument that follows: (i) Chief Characteristics of a Duty, a Permissible Act, a Wrongful Act, and an Act of Supererogation; (ii) Leibniz's Law: The Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles; (iii) If God Did Not Command Francis' Preaching to the Birds; (iv) If God Did Command Francis' Preaching to the Birds; (v) The Individual Duty; and (vi) A Refutation of Urmson's Three Reasons for Claiming that Francis' Act was Supererogatory.

Chief Characteristics of a Duty, Permissible Act, Wrongful Act, and an Act of
Supererogation

For the sake of argument, I will assume the fourfold deontic classification of moral acts for which Urmson argued. Each category of act possesses certain properties. As will be shown, these are shared between two or more categories. However, all of the moral categories are “mutually exclusive,”¹⁴ meaning that no two share *all* of the same properties. The table below provides a summary of how they differ.

	Duty	Permissible	Wrong	Supererogation
Obligatory for every moral agent	yes	no	no	no
Forbidden for every moral agent	no	no	yes	no
Indifferent for every moral agent	no	yes	no	no
Optional for every moral agent	no	yes	no	yes

While the last category, “Optional for every moral agent” is somewhat redundant and is captured conceptually within the combination of the first two categories, it will still be helpful for elucidating the difference between these various classifications later in this chapter.

A duty is an act possessing moral worth and for this reason is not merely permissible. An act that is considered a duty is right to do and wrong not to do. Therefore, it is not optional, meaning that it is “[an act] that is forbidden to refrain from doing.”¹⁵ Every moral agent is obligated to perform the duty. An act that is morally wrong is forbidden. Every moral agent is morally obligated

¹⁴ Millard Schumaker actually says that the categories are not only mutually exclusive, but also “jointly exhaustive.” However, I omit this phrase because it would be confusing in this context. The reason is simple: I am assuming the fourfold classificatory system here, whereas Schumaker is referring to the threefold classification system when he makes this remark. So while the phrase “mutually exclusive” is helpful, the latter phrase is not the point I am making here and would require much more explanation than what is needed considering my present aim. See Millard Schumaker, “Deontic Morality and the Problem of Supererogation,” *Philosophical Studies* 23 (1972): 427.

¹⁵ C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

to refrain from performing the act and therefore it is not optional. In other words, the act is “one that it is obligatory to refrain from doing.”¹⁶ A merely permissible act is indifferent from a moral perspective. It simply does not matter whether an agent performs the act or not. Unlike the choice to throw oneself on a grenade to save one’s comrades, whether you double-knot your shoes is not morally significant.¹⁷ Because the act is morally indifferent, it is optional. If the agent performs the permissible act, they have not acted rightly from a moral perspective. In a similar vein, if the agent does not perform the permissible act, they have not done anything wrong. The performance or nonperformance of a permissible act is truly of no moral consequence.

Unlike a permissible act, an act of supererogation possesses moral worth. Although a supererogatory act can also be described as permissible, its performance or nonperformance is not arbitrary.¹⁸ It counts in the moral sphere for some reason or another even though, unlike a duty, it is not obligatory. Also, because a supererogatory deed possesses moral worth and is praiseworthy to perform, it is obviously not forbidden. And last, it is not like a permissible act because while both are optional, it is not indifferent from a moral perspective. As Sven Ove Hansson writes, “some optional acts are not supererogatory.”¹⁹ This is why Paul McNamara states that part of the classic conception of supererogation is the “Optional Non-Indifference of Supererogation.”²⁰ Paul McNamara does an excellent job differentiating between the two properties of indifference and optionality. In what he labels a “classic candidate for supererogation,” he writes of a mailwoman who rushes into a burning building that has reached a dangerous stage to rescue an infant.

¹⁶ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷ Dale Dorsey, “The Supererogatory, and How to Accommodate It,” *Utilitas* 25, no. 3 (2013): 356.

¹⁸ John Rawls is helpful here. He writes that there are two types of permissible acts: ones that possess moral value and ones that are morally indifferent (or trivial). The former are classified as merely permissible whereas the latter are classified as supererogatory (since they are not obligatory like a duty, though a duty can also be described as “permissible”). See Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 117.

¹⁹ Sven Ove Hansson, “Representing Supererogation,” *Journal of Logic and Computation* 25, no.2 (2015): 445.

²⁰ McNamara, “Making Room,” 420.

Assuming that there is a difference between moral indifference and moral optionality, McNamara writes,

Although the mailwoman's optional rescue was not a matter of indifference, that she wore black socks that day was. Why? Because unlike her rescue, nothing of moral weight that she was permitted to do on that day hinged on her wearing or not wearing black socks. Morality shrugs at what is indifferent. But as supererogation makes clear, morality needn't shrug at what is optional.²¹

In a nutshell, what distinguishes a supererogatory act from a permissible act is that a supererogatory act is not morally indifferent even though both are optional. The above reasons help explain why Urmson believed that the category of supererogation is needed to correctly classify acts that possess moral worth but are neither required nor forbidden.

Having briefly characterized all four types of acts within the fourfold classificatory scheme, I will now present Leibniz's Law. Following this next section, the previous table will be utilized and expanded to show that Francis' preaching cannot be classified as supererogatory as Urmson proposed. This table will also serve to highlight the need for another category in order to accommodate a particular type of moral act that cannot be subsumed in either the threefold or fourfold classificatory scheme.

Leibniz's Law: The Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles

In section nine of his *Discourse on Metaphysics*, Gottfried Leibniz wrote, "it is not true that two substances can resemble each other completely and differ only in number [*solo numero*]. . . ." ²² The principle that was derived from this metaphysical statement came to be known as the Identity of Indiscernibles. Logically, the principle is often formulated as follows: "if, for every property *F*, object *x* has *F* if and only if object *y* has *F*, then *x* is identical

²¹ Ibid., 420.

²² Gottfried W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. by Daniel Garber and Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991), 9.

to *y*.”²³ In everyday vernacular, Leibniz’s Law is the principle that two distinct things cannot *exactly* resemble each other because no two distinct things have exactly the same properties.²⁴ If two things do have the exact same properties, we are no longer discussing two distinct things, but one single thing.

Leibniz’s Law will be utilized as follows: (1) to show that if we assume for the sake of argument that God did *not* command Francis to preach to the birds, then the act cannot be classified as supererogatory, but rather, only as permissible; and (2) to show that if we assume for the sake of argument that God *did* command Francis to preach to the birds, then his act still cannot be classified as supererogatory. Essentially, Leibniz’s Law will help elucidate the fact that no matter what we assume of Francis and some otherworldly voice, Urmsen was incorrect to offer this example as an instance of supererogation. At the same time, I will further argue that Leibniz’s Law demonstrates that not only should Francis’ preaching to the birds not be classified as supererogatory, it also cannot be subsumed under any of the other remaining categories in the fourfold scheme. Therefore, another classificatory category is needed. In more logical language, if the act of Francis’ preaching to the birds can be shown to possess a set of properties that does not exactly mirror the set of properties that characterize any of the act categories in the fourfold classificatory scheme, then this will suggest that not only is Francis’ act not supererogatory, but another category is needed.²⁵

If God Did Not Command Francis to Preach to the Birds

Susan Hale writes, “Perhaps Francis’ belief that he was duty-bound to preach to the birds was mistaken.”²⁶ From my perspective, this could mean a

²³ Peter Forrest, “The Identity of Indiscernibles,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2016 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Stanford: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2016.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ I refrain from saying a “fifth” category because I stated from the outset that I was only assuming the classification of supererogation for the sake of argument. No argument was offered.

²⁶ Hale, “Against Supererogation,” 282. Along with several others, Sheldon Peterfreund also recognizes the fact that it is not uncommon for a person performing a supererogatory

number of things. It could be that the God of Christianity (or any god, for that matter) does not exist. This would logically preclude the possibility of God commanding Francis since it was this God in particular from which he believed the command to originate. Or, it could be that God does exist but never commanded Francis to preach to the birds. In either case, Francis would have been mistaken in his conviction that God had commanded him to preach to the birds. In this section, I am assuming that no divine being commanded Francis to preach to the birds and that Francis' claim represents an honest but mistaken interpretation of a psychological event. Under this assumption, the act must be assessed from a purely *moral* perspective since there is nothing spiritually relevant to be taken into account.

If God did not command Francis to preach to the birds, then it can be shown that Francis' act is morally indifferent and must therefore be classified as merely permissible rather than supererogatory. The table below is the same table that was presented earlier and has now been expanded to include Francis' preaching to the birds:

	Duty	Permissible	Wrong	Superero- gation	Francis' preaching to the birds (God did not command him to do so)
Obligatory for every moral agent	yes	no	no	no	no
Forbidden for every moral agent	no	no	yes	no	no
Indifferent for every moral agent	no	yes	no	no	yes
Optional for	no	yes	no	yes	yes

deed to consider it nothing more than a duty. He writes: "Of course, I am not denying that the individual who performs the act may think it is morally obligatory." See Peterfreund, "On the Relationship Between Supererogation and Basic Duty," 54.

every moral agent					
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According to Leibniz's Law, Francis' preaching to the birds is not supererogatory, because an act of supererogation and Francis' act do not share all of the same properties. Granted, neither a supererogatory act nor Francis' act is required or forbidden; therefore both are optional. However, an act of supererogation possesses moral worth whereas Francis' act does not (i.e., under the present assumption). So why should Francis' act be classified as merely permissible (i.e., morally neutral) in the absence of God's command? Simply stated, talking to birds about anything is at best, silly, and at worst, a potential symptom of mental confusion. Now, if God commanded the act, then it is meaningful to him and that alone is sufficient to imbue the act with moral value. However, this section is committed to analyzing Francis' act while assuming that he was mistaken and that God never commanded him to preach to the feathery creatures. If no divine command was being fulfilled in Francis' act, then speaking to non-cognitive animals of any sort—much less preaching—seems utterly foolish, and one would be hard pressed to defend any other view. I do not think this claim requires a robust, logical defense. The burden of proof is on the moral philosopher or theologian who wishes to prove otherwise. I am not going to go outside, preach to the trees, and require someone to prove that the act does not have moral value. Common sense says that it does not.

In the absence of God's command, the table reveals that Francis' preaching does not share all of the same properties with acts of supererogation. An act of supererogation is not "Indifferent for every moral agent" while Francis' act is. Therefore, Francis' act cannot be identified with a supererogatory act according to Leibniz's Law. Apart from the divine command, the act possesses no moral worth and Urmson should have noticed this in the absence of the only thing that could give the act any moral worth—i.e., God's command. All things considered, Leibniz's Law demonstrates that

in the absence of God’s command, Francis’ act cannot be classified as supererogatory.

If God Did Command Francis’ Preaching to the Birds

But what if the tables are turned? In the previous section, I argued that if God never commanded Francis to preach to the birds, then Francis’ act could not be classified as *supererogatory* because it would be morally indifferent (i.e., permissible). In this section, the opposite scenario—that *God did speak to Francis, commanding him alone to preach to the birds*—is assumed for the sake of argument. The point in assuming the opposite is to demonstrate that no matter what we assume of Francis and some otherworldly voice, Urmsen was incorrect to offer this example as an instance of supererogation. According to Leibniz’s Law, if we assume that God did command Francis to preach to the birds, the act still cannot be classified as supererogatory. Having revised the scenario from the previous section, the table below has once again been expanded.

	Duty	Permissible	Wrong	Superero- gation	Francis’ preaching to the birds (God did not command him to do so)	Francis’ preaching to the birds (God did command him to do so)
Obligatory for <i>every</i> moral agent	yes	no	no	no	no	no
Forbidden for <i>every</i> moral agent	no	no	yes	no	no	no

Indifferent for <i>every</i> moral agent	no	yes	no	no	yes	no
Optional for <i>every</i> moral agent ²⁷	no	yes	no	yes	yes	no

An act of supererogation and Francis' preaching to the birds once again share all but one property. However, the property that is not shared in this particular context differs from the unshared property in the previous context.

When we assumed that God *did not* command Francis to preach, Francis' act was of no moral worth in contradistinction to the moral value of a supererogatory act. On the other hand, when we assume for the sake of argument that God *did* command Francis to preach to the birds, now the property-discrepancy between his act and an act of supererogation shifts. Although his act and an act of supererogation both possess moral value under the revised assumption, his preaching can no longer be described as "optional for *every* moral agent." The emphasis here is on "every." For Francis, this act is now right to do and wrong not to do; it is not optional. The non-optionalness of the act for Francis immediately rules out a supererogatory classification because there is at least one subject in the universe for whom this act is not optional. To say otherwise would violate the criterion of universal optionality that is a bedrock component in the classic conception of supererogation.

²⁷ For the first time in this chapter, the relevance of the fourth row, "Optional for every moral agent," is apparent. At first glance, it seems to be a mere rewording of the first row, "Obligatory for every moral agent." After all, if an act is obligatory for every moral agent, then it is not optional, and if an act is optional for every moral agent, then it is not obligatory. However, in the present chart, the row is necessary to distinguish between an act of supererogation and Francis' act (under the present assumption that God did speak to Francis). Without this additional row, the nuanced distinction would not register in the table. If the first three rows were the only ones, then an act of supererogation and Francis' act would appear to possess the same properties, which according to Leibniz's Law, would mean that Francis' act is supererogatory. However, the additional row reveals that this is not the case. The additional row is necessary to make theoretical room for what I am referring to as an "individual duty." Otherwise, the property difference would go unnoticed using only the first three rows.

In addition, the above table also reveals that Francis' preaching to the birds does not share the same set of properties with any of the other three remaining classifications when it is assumed that God did speak to Francis. This is evidenced by the following: (1) unlike a duty, the act is not obligatory for every moral agent; (2) unlike a wrongful act, it is not forbidden for every moral agent (or any for that matter); and (3) unlike a merely permissible act, the act is not morally indifferent for every moral agent. When you take all of this into consideration, it is evident that the tripartite scheme that Urmson criticizes, as well as the fourfold classification that he proposes, both lack a classificatory category for acts such as Francis' preaching to the birds, which Urmson mistakenly classifies as supererogatory. Assuming that God did speak to Francis and that Francis was not mistaken in what he perceived God to be commanding, the only option that remains if one hopes to correctly classify this act is to introduce a different category that is properly nuanced to fit Francis' act as well as others like it.

The Individual Duty

As indicated in the previous sections, certain types of acts cannot be properly classified without taking into consideration the theological context within which they occur. This is made clear in Urmson's inability to classify Francis' preaching to the birds correctly. This suggests that from the perspective of Protestant ethics, a unique category of action is needed if we hope to be able to classify the full range of acts from the perspective of moral worth.²⁸

To rightly assess Francis' act, it is paramount to consider the personal nature of Christian experience. Analyzing God's speech from a philosophical perspective, Nicholas Wosterstorff writes: "It was characteristic of Jews and Christians then, and it remains characteristic of them now, to speak of God as

²⁸ It is of the utmost importance to state here that one does not necessarily have to commit to what Robert Adams refers to as a "comprehensive divine command theory of obligation." See Adams, "Vocation," 462.

commanding, promising, forgiving, exhorting, assuring, asserting, and so forth.”²⁹ It has been the testimony of Christians all throughout the ages that God speaks in a personal manner and that as a result of the divine address, obligations often ensue that are binding for the individual that is addressed. This type of divine address assumes the form of a “command that generates obligation.”³⁰ In his *Systematic Theology*, Wayne Grudem explains that one of the four meanings of the Biblical phrase “Word of God” is “God’s words of personal address.”³¹ Regarding this form of communication, Grudem writes, “God sometimes communicates with people on earth by speaking directly to them.”³² After discussing various moments recorded in scripture when God spoke personally to Adam and Eve,³³ Moses,³⁴ and those around Jesus at his baptism,³⁵ Grudem writes:

In these and several other instances where God spoke words of personal address to individual people it was clear to the hearers that these were the actual words of God: they were hearing God’s very voice, and they were therefore hearing words that had absolute divine authority and that were absolutely trustworthy. To disbelieve or disobey any of these words would have been to disbelieve or disobey God and therefore would have been sin.³⁶

One only has to think of Abraham to conceive of the type of obligation that can result from God speaking a word of personal address to a specific person. God approaches Abraham in his later years and says: “Take your son, your only son Isaac,³⁷ whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there

²⁹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 8.

³⁰ It is important to note that John Hare actually applies this phrase to precepts (i.e., commandments, not individual duties), when he discusses five general types of divine prescriptions. However, I believe the phrase also applies to a command that creates an obligation for only one individual. See John Hare, *God’s Command* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 37.

³¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 48.

³² *Ibid.*, 48.

³³ Before and after The Fall.

³⁴ The giving of the Ten Commandments as recorded in Exod. 20:1–17.

³⁵ As recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels.

³⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 48.

³⁷ Though Isaac was Abraham and Sarah’s only son together, Abraham had another son—Ishmael—with Hagar, Sarah’s “Egyptian slave-girl.” See Gen. 16:1–6.

as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.”³⁸ In an act that defies understanding (the very reason for which Søren Kierkegaard sings Abraham’s praises in *Fear and Trembling* on numerous occasions³⁹), Abraham obeys without hesitation.⁴⁰ Rising early the next morning, he sets to work saddling the donkey and cutting the wood.⁴¹ He then sets out on the three-day journey so that he can obey God. When Abraham arrives, he and Isaac travel to the top of the mountain where he makes the preparations. The story culminates with an angel of the Lord calling his name and stopping him in the last moment before he kills Isaac. Although God stopped him, the point is that Abraham was determined to perform this act to obey God completely. Now how are we to interpret such an act? Nowhere in the Bible do we find another account of God asking a father to do such a thing. To further complicate matters, this command appears to violate the sixth commandment that God would eventually give to the nation of Israel hundreds of years later as part of the Mosaic covenant: “You shall not murder.”⁴² In Hare’s words, the case of Abraham seems to suggest that “God’s will and God’s command can diverge.”⁴³ Setting aside this moral conundrum for now, the relevant point in

³⁸ Gen. 22:2.

³⁹ Concerning Abraham’s decision to leave the land of his fathers and become a foreigner in the land God promised, Kierkegaard writes of Abraham: “He left one thing behind and took one thing with him. He left his worldly understanding behind and took faith with him . . .” See Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Sylvia Walsh, ed. C. Stephen Evans and Sylvia Walsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 14. Concerning God’s promise to multiply Abraham’s descendants, even though God was telling him to sacrifice Isaac, Kierkegaard writes: “But Abraham believed and did not doubt; he believed the preposterous.” See Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 17.

⁴⁰ God may have never intended Abraham to sacrifice his son. Nicholas Wolterstorff writes that sometimes a command is given to test someone’s loyalty, obedience, or moral character. It could be that God only wanted Abraham to “set about the project of sacrificing Isaac” or merely “form the intention” of doing so. See Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 22.

⁴¹ Gen. 22:3.

⁴² Exod. 20:13; The apparent contradiction is what prompted Kierkegaard to introduce the concept of the “teleological suspension of the ethical” in an effort to understand God’s command to Abraham. See Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 49. Kierkegaard writes of Abraham: “There is no higher expression for the ethical in Abraham’s life than this, that the father must love the son.” See Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 52. However, God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, which is a clear violation of the ethical. Thus, Abraham had to choose whether to act morally or to obey God. He chose to grab the knife and obey God. About this decision, Kierkegaard writes: “By [Abraham’s] act he transcended the whole of the ethical and had a higher telos outside, in relation to which he suspended it.” See Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 52.

⁴³ Hare, *God’s Command*, 57.

this story concerning an individual duty is straightforward: *God gave Abraham a command that applied to no one else.* It was Abraham's task to kill his son and it possessed the same obligatory status *for him* as any other duty that would be considered universal in scope. God had spoken, and his words created a specific, individual duty that was binding upon Abraham alone.

Grudem concludes his discussion of God's *words of personal address* by writing: "the words always place an absolute obligation upon the hearers to believe them and to obey them fully."⁴⁴ In cases such as Abraham and Francis, God gives an assignment to a single individual, which means that the obligation is binding for that agent alone. It is a duty for one individual but not for any other. As alluded to in the introduction to this chapter, the idea of an "individual duty" is best explained by the Protestant concept of vocation. This idea came to the forefront of Protestant thought in the teaching and writings of Martin Luther. In his sermon titled "Exposition of Psalm 127," Luther affirms the value that God places on work: "Man must and ought to work."⁴⁵ He continues: "God wills that man should work, and without work He will give him nothing," and "man must necessarily work and busy himself at something."⁴⁶ However, Luther does not stop at merely affirming the value of work. In his sermon titled, "Our Christian Duties. An Exhortation to the New Christian Life," he says that a person is called by God to work in "[their] respective station, in the office committed to him," as a means of "[serving] his fellows."⁴⁷ The phrase, "committed to him," is important because it captures the idea of "calling" which, as stated earlier in the chapter, is at the heart of the Protestant concept of vocation. The basic idea is that because God *commits* an individual to a particular station or office, that person will experience a respective "call" to enter into that area of service to serve others and ultimately God. Essentially, this "station" or "office" is the person's vocation.

⁴⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 48.

⁴⁵ Martin Luther, "Exposition of Psalms 127," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 45, trans. and ed. Walther I. Brandt (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 324.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 326.

⁴⁷ Martin Luther, "Our Christian Duties. An Exhortation to the New Christian Life," in *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 7, trans. and ed. John Nicholas Lenker (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 278.

One of the clearest places to observe Luther's view of a station or office as a vocation is in his discussion of soldiers. In 1525, a professional soldier by the name of Assa von Kram pleaded with Luther to write on the issue of whether soldiers can be Christians in good conscience because it appears that von Kram was fearful that his profession could not be reconciled with his Christian faith.⁴⁸ As a result, Luther wrote his treatise titled, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved." Using John the Baptist as an example, Luther reminds the reader that when soldiers approached John in the wilderness to repent and be baptized, they would ask: "And we, what should we do?"⁴⁹ Luther points out that rather than John the Baptist "[condemning] their office or [advising] them to stop doing their work,"⁵⁰ he delivered the following instructions: "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."⁵¹ Luther interprets this response from John the Baptist as one of the proofs that the office—or vocation—of the soldier (i.e., "military profession") is "in itself a legitimate and godly calling and occupation."⁵² Luther also mentions other stations such as: *lords, servants, princes, subjects, maids, farmers, laborers, trial judges, and even executioners.*⁵³ In all of these examples, Luther's overall point is clear: *God calls an individual to a specific vocation as a way for that person to serve God and others.*

Regarding the doctrine of vocation, Gustaf Wingren summarizes Luther's view as presented in his teaching on Psalm 127. Wingren writes:

In his vocation man does works which affect the well-being of others; for so God has made all offices. Through this work in man's offices, God's creative work goes forward, and that creative work of love, a profusion of good gifts. With persons as his "hands" and "coworkers," God gives his gifts through the earthly vocations, toward man's life on earth (food through farmers, fishermen and hunters; external peace

⁴⁸ Robert C. Schultz, Introduction to "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 46, trans. Charles M. Jacobs, ed. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1967), 91.

⁴⁹ Luke 3:14.

⁵⁰ Luther, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved," 97.

⁵¹ Luke 3:14.

⁵² Luther, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved," 100.

⁵³ Luther mentioned the first seven in one sermon. See Luther, "Our Christian Duties," 276–277. The last two examples are from his writings. See Luther, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved," 94.

through princes, judges, and orderly powers; knowledge and education through teachers and parents, etc, etc). Through the preacher's vocation, God gives the forgiveness of sins. Thus love comes from God, flowing down to human beings on earth through all vocations, through both spiritual and earthly governments.⁵⁴

Building on this idea, Robert Adams explains that in some instances, this vocation "must be something that involves a divine command that adds to the stock of ethical principles, so to speak, something that is irreducibly about me as an individual. God's address to me with a specific command is indispensable to the grounding of the fact that this is my task."⁵⁵ In what Adams labels a "divine command theory of vocation,"⁵⁶ vocation means "calling"⁵⁷ and gives rise to specific obligations that are ultimately rooted in God's "divine purpose"⁵⁸ for the individual that is addressed. These vocation-related obligations are specific to the individual and possess for that individual alone the normative weight of what Urmson refers to as "rock-bottom duties."⁵⁹

In the second section of this chapter, I will explain how Gregory Mellema incorporates this concept of vocation to explain how theistic supererogationists and theistic anti-supererogationists might strike a compromise. Prior to doing this, however, I want to finish this section by addressing the three reasons that Urmson provides in support of his argument that Francis' act cannot be classified as a duty. This is important because the analysis provides yet

⁵⁴ Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 27–28.

⁵⁵ Adams, "Vocation," 450.

⁵⁶ Adams makes an important point concerning a "divine command theory of vocation." He writes: "A divine command theory of vocation does not entail (though it is obviously consistent with) a comprehensive divine command theory of obligation. It does not imply that all obligations are constituted by divine commands, nor that ethical wrongness, for example, is the property of being contrary to divine commands. All it implies about the relation of obligation in general to God is that it is possible for some obligations to be imposed by a divine command." See Adams, "Vocation," 462. The reason that this is important is that I do not want my argument in this section to be interpreted as a broader argument that Christian ethics is primarily deontological in nature.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 451. Karlfried Froehlich makes a similar point. In an article discussing Martin Luther's use of the German word *beruf* for "vocation" or "Christian calling," he writes: "'Vocation' is a Latin word, *vocatio*, derived from the verb, *vocare*, to call. The English equivalent would be the noun 'call' or more precisely, 'calling.'" See Karlfried Froehlich, "Luther on Vocation," *Lutheran Quarterly* 8 (1999): 196.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 455.

⁵⁹ Urmson, "Saints and Heroes," 204.

another window into the nature of an “individual duty,” a category that Urmson apparently did not have at his disposal.

A Refutation of Urmson’s Three Reasons for Claiming that Francis’ Act was Supererogatory

Although Francis wholeheartedly believed that his preaching to the birds was a duty, Urmson claimed that he was mistaken for the following three reasons: (1) only Francis could call his act a duty; (2) Francis could not say it was a duty for any other moral agent; and 3) nobody else could call on him to perform the act as they could with other “rock-bottom duties” such as *telling the truth* and *keeping a promise*.⁶⁰ For Urmson, this is conclusive evidence that Francis was mistaken in his belief that it was “his duty to preach to the feathered world.” However, the additional category of an *individual duty* can handle the peculiarity of Francis’ assertion (i.e., that it was his duty to preach to the birds) in the face of Urmson’s concerns, and thereby provide support for Francis’ evaluation of his act. Concerning Urmson’s three reasons, I will take each in turn.

The first two reasons why Urmson does not think that Francis’ act can be construed as possessing equal normative weight with rock-bottom duties are directly related to each other and represent two different ways of making the same point. Claiming that Francis “cannot say it is a duty for any other moral agent” is just another way of saying “only Francis can call his action a duty.” Therefore, the following explanation will suffice to refute both of Urmson’s first two reasons why, in his opinion, Francis was mistaken to believe that his preaching to the birds was a duty. In a Kantian line of thought, Urmson is working with the presupposition that a genuine moral duty is binding on all moral agents. Urmson seems to have this idea in mind when he argues that Francis was mistaken to think of his preaching to birds as a duty. After all, Francis could only say that it was *his* duty and could in no way claim that other

⁶⁰ Ibid., 204.

moral agents were bound to do the same. For Urmson, either the act is a duty and is therefore universally binding or else it is merely permissible or supererogatory and in either case is not universally binding. Because Urmson did not have the idea of an individual duty in his conceptual framework, he was left with only two remaining options: (1) claim that Francis was mistaken in the classification of his act as a duty since he was not willing to say that preaching to the birds was a universal obligation (thus defending the supererogatory classification of Francis' act in his own mind), or (2) argue that Francis was not mistaken, and that consequently preaching to the birds is a duty for all (or at least all Christians). Faced with these two options, Urmson opts for the former, as I suspect any rational person would. He wrote, "Subjectively, we may say, at the time of action, the deed presented itself as a duty, but it was not a duty."⁶¹ Urmson is saying that Francis' self-report was mistaken, and that although preaching to the birds was thought to be a duty, it was not as a "piece of objective reporting."⁶² In other words, the only realm in which this act could be considered a duty was in Francis' mistaken, subjective psychological assessment of it. David Heyd affirms the possibility of an agent like Francis misclassifying an act when he writes: "the fact that the agent believes that his act is obligatory does not in itself disqualify it from being supererogatory. This is an important caveat, as most supererogatory acts are proclaimed by their agents to be duties."⁶³ Urmson could not imagine any scenario in which Francis' act could be objectively classified as a duty. This is because Urmson was confronted with a false dilemma—either classify Francis' act as a duty and thereby assert that it is universally binding, or claim that the act cannot be universally binding and therefore Francis was wrong—as a result of the inadequacy of his fourfold classificatory framework to accommodate the type of act that is absolutely obligatory for one individual while not being so for others. The third option, of course, is to classify the act as an individual duty so that it is simultaneously binding for Francis but not universally obligatory.

⁶¹ Ibid., 204.

⁶² Ibid., 204.

⁶³ Heyd, *Supererogation*, 138.

In all fairness, Urmson is not the only moral philosopher who has made this mistake. In the first book ever published on supererogation in moral philosophy, David Heyd addresses the type of situation where a person believes that an act is obligatory although, in Heyd's opinion, it is not. Heyd then writes that the reason a person might claim an act is a duty when in fact it is not is "moral modesty." This moral modesty can take one of two forms: (1) the moral agent who has performed the act knows it is supererogatory but does not want to say it, and (2) the moral agent genuinely believes that they were only performing a duty.⁶⁴ Heyd then argues that this second form of moral modesty is problematic because it means one of two things: that the moral agent views the act as a duty and therefore as an obligation for all others, or that the moral agent believes the supererogatory act to be "personally binding" but does not believe it is binding for others. Ultimately, Heyd's objection is that no matter which of the two meanings you think is implied by the second form of moral modesty, both are logically inconsistent. If the act that a person performs is supererogatory, then it cannot be obligatory for anyone, and if the act is binding, then it is binding for all, not just for the individual person. Ultimately, Heyd writes that this "attitude is inconsistent."⁶⁵ For this reason, Heyd rejects the possibility of a "subjective duty" because it is a betrayal of the notion of universalizability that accompanies our conception of duty. As with Urmson, there is no possibility in Heyd's deontological framework to accommodate any act that is obligatory for a single individual but not for others.

As should be obvious, Heyd faces the same logical issue that confronted Urmson. Neither thinker had a category for the type of act that is morally binding for one person but not for others. Because this category was absent, both thinkers had no choice but to say, "Either the act is a duty and binding for all, or it is not and is binding for none." Returning to Urmson's article in particular, he as a moral philosopher did not take into account the Christian doctrine that a personal, relational God who "formed my inward parts" and "knit

⁶⁴ Ibid., 138.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 138.

me together in my mother's womb"⁶⁶ creates each individual person to serve him and others in a particular way. This way represents a person's vocation and is not necessarily identifiable with a specific occupation.⁶⁷ According to this doctrine, a personal God commands person-specific tasks (in addition to the acts that are obligatory for all) that are binding for that agent alone in relation to their overall, purpose-rooted vocation. Although an omnipotent God could do everything himself by the "mere fiat of omnipotence,"⁶⁸ he chooses not to. As C.S. Lewis writes of God: "Creation seems to be delegation through and through. He will do nothing simply of Himself which can be done by creatures." God's relationality compels him to elicit our help so that his kingdom can be established in partnership with us. In the words of Francis Schaeffer, he is the "*personal-infinite* God."⁶⁹ God creates a human being in a specific manner to serve him in a particular way and based on that calling, issues commands to that individual that are directly connected to the fulfillment of that vocation. This can easily explain why Francis believed that preaching to the feathered world was a duty for him while not being so for any other person.⁷⁰ Assuming for the sake of argument that God had commanded Francis to preach to the birds, he was obligated to do so just as he was obligated to tell the truth or keep a promise. For him, it was right to do and wrong not to do and therefore not supererogatory. However, the act also cannot be classified as a duty in the traditional sense because it is not universally binding. Consequently, there is an act that is normatively equivalent to a "rock-bottom duty" for Francis, although not for any other moral agent. Neither the traditional tripartite classificatory scheme nor Urmson's fourfold

⁶⁶ Ps. 139:13.

⁶⁷ Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 4.

⁶⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 1963): 70.

⁶⁹ Italics mine. Francis A. Schaeffer, *He is There and He is Not Silent*, in *The Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 286. Though Schaeffer uses this terminology for God throughout his writings, this is one place in particular where he is actually arguing for the importance of the concept of the personal-infinite God.

⁷⁰ For any other person, the act would fall under one of two categories: (1) merely permissible (as it appears preaching to the birds would be for anyone not "called"); and (2) morally wrong (this might be the case if preaching to the birds actually prevented one from doing what God was specifically calling them to do).

classificatory scheme can accommodate such an act. So when Urmson attempted to classify Francis' act, he had no choice but to classify it as supererogatory because (1) he could not classify it as a duty since a duty is universalizable and Francis' act clearly was not, and (2) he could not classify it as merely permissible because he believed it possessed moral worth for Francis.⁷¹ This resulted in a supererogatory classification. However, whereas Urmson cannot account for an individual duty, the Christian doctrine of a personal, revelatory God in conjunction with the Protestant notion of vocation can. This is sufficient to show the inadequacy of Urmson's first two reasons—only Francis could call his act a duty and Francis could not say it was a duty for any other moral agent—for rejecting Francis' claim that he was duty-bound to preach to the birds. With the classification of individual duty, Francis can call his act a duty (i.e., an individual duty) while still maintaining that the act is not obligatory for anyone else. This is exactly what Urmson and later Heyd could not do.

The third reason that Urmson offers for denying Francis' claim is that no one else can call on him to perform the act of preaching to the birds as they can other "rock-bottom duties" such as telling the truth and keeping a promise. For Urmson, this feature of an act is one of the distinguishing marks of a supererogatory deed. This point is most clearly expressed in the case of the self-sacrificing soldier which serves as Urmson's paradigmatic example of supererogation. Urmson writes:

We may imagine a squad of soldiers to be practicing the throwing of live hand grenades; a grenade slips from the hand of one of them and rolls on the ground near the squad; one of them sacrifices his life by throwing himself on the grenade and protecting his comrades with his own body. . . . If he had not done so, could anyone have said to him, "You ought to have thrown yourself on the grenade"? Could a superior have decently ordered him to do it? The answer to all these questions is plainly negative.⁷²

⁷¹ I assume that the option of classifying Francis' preaching to the birds as a wrongful act is so unmistakably absurd that it should not be considered a real option.

⁷² Urmson, "Saints and Heroes," 202–203.

In this example, not even the soldier's superior could have ordered such an act. If a higher-ranking officer could not demand such an act although the deed was of great moral consequence, then surely no one else could. Michael Ferry writes: "where an act is obligatory there is at least someone with the normative authority to *demand* that the agent perform it."⁷³ Because this "someone" does not exist in Urmson's view, the act remains optional though it possesses moral worth. It is therefore supererogatory. However, Urmson once again commits a significant oversight. By "anyone," Urmson is clearly and solely referring to human beings. As a moral philosopher, this is fine. If he had not tried to address a religious example as a moral philosopher, there would have been no problem. However, failure to take into consideration the broader theological context within which Francis lives and acts once again leads Urmson astray. The fact that no *human being* can require such a behavior of Francis does not mean that no one can. From a Christian perspective, there exists a personal, speaking God who by right of creation possesses the authority to call on Francis *alone* to preach to the birds. Thus, Urmson's third reason for rejecting Francis' conviction that preaching to the birds is a duty fails when assessed from within the framework of Christian theology.

With the weakness of Urmson's three chief reasons for classifying Francis' act as supererogatory exposed, I will conclude by demonstrating the value and uniqueness of the proposed category of an *individual duty* using Leibniz's Law. I refrain from using the phrase "subjective duty" because this language is used by Urmson and later Heyd to imply that the act is not a duty even though the moral agent thinks that it is. In my account, Francis made no mistake in implying that he was obligated to preach to the birds although it was not obligatory for any other moral agent. Only with the introduction of the classificatory category of "individual duty" can this complex, spiritually-motivated act be accommodated. I have included the table from the last subsection once more to show the difference between the properties possessed by Francis' preaching to the birds in contrast to the other four

⁷³ Michael Ferry, "Beyond Obligation: Reasons and Supererogation," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 77 (2015): 58.

categories. The table is the same except for a couple of minor changes. Because I am taking into account the theological context of Francis' act and assuming that within Christian practice, God does sometimes command certain individuals to do something that he might not command others, I have eliminated the column where Francis' act was assessed from the perspective of there being no prior divine command. In addition, I have incorporated the classification label "individual duty" in place of the description, "Francis' preaching to the birds (assuming that God did command him to do so)" in the last column since that is what is being evaluated.

	Duty	Permissible	Wrong	Supererogation	Individual Duty
Obligatory for every moral agent	yes	no	no	no	no
Forbidden for every moral agent	no	no	yes	no	no
Indifferent for every moral agent	no	yes	no	no	no
Optional for every moral agent	no	yes	no	yes	no

Leibniz's Law reveals that an individual duty *cannot* be subsumed under any of the other categories for the simple reason that its set of properties do not mirror any other set in the remaining four classifications. Therefore, this category of act stands alone and cannot be subsumed by any of the others. Using the property language of the table, an individual duty is the type of act which is obligatory for at least one agent and is therefore not optional for every agent. This is unique because usually an act is obligatory for every person (i.e., universal in scope) if it is obligatory for one, and the same is true of the property of optionality. Within Urmson's deontic framework, this type of act

cannot be accommodated. However, if you take into account the theological context within which Francis was acting, the necessity and value of another category—the individual duty—becomes clear.

Before moving to the second section, I would like to address the concern that some may have of my eagerness to introduce an additional classificatory category for moral acts. I admit that this should not be done carelessly. After all, the tried and tested *Occam's razor* suggests that we should always proceed cautiously if we are going to multiply entities and only do so if absolutely necessary. In this case, I hope that I have shown that the *individual duty* classification is necessary for certain acts that possess moral worth and are obligatory for only one individual. Besides, introducing a new classificatory category (or categories) is not without precedent. In what Shlomo Cohen calls the “spirit of the expansionist school,”⁷⁴ other moral philosophers have also argued that additional categories are needed in addition to supererogation if we hope to rightly classify the full range of human acts. Three come to mind. Cohen has argued for the additional classification of “forced supererogation.” These are acts characterized by the following: (a) performance is praiseworthy (unlike a duty according to Cohen); (b) nonperformance is not blameworthy (unlike a duty); and (c) nonperformance is wrong (unlike an act of supererogation). Due to this unique set of characteristics, Cohen believes that this additional classification is needed. Secondly, Chisholm and Sosa have also argued that Urmson's fourfold classificatory scheme was deficient. They proposed a fifth category of action titled “offensive.” They write: “an act is (merely) offensive if its performance is morally bad and its nonperformance not morally good.”⁷⁵ In other words, although performing the act is wrong, not performing the act is not necessarily commendable from a moral standpoint. Whether their defense of this claim is successful is another matter. What is important is that they too saw fit to introduce an additional category. Thirdly, Paul McNamara has gone as far as

⁷⁴ Shlomo Cohen, “Forced Supererogation,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 23 (2013): 1006.

⁷⁵ Chisholm and Sosa, “Intrinsic Preferability,” 327.

to suggest that there are eight “normative statuses.”⁷⁶ Describing each of the eight categories would take us beyond the scope of this chapter, but the more general point remains: *introducing the category of individual duty is not without precedent.*

Among the four philosophers just named, it is important to mention that there is one marked difference between their views and mine. In pointing out this distinction, the overall purpose of my thesis is reiterated. Whereas they take supererogation for granted and build out from that presupposition, I do not. On the contrary, no argument has been offered for or against supererogation within Protestant ethics up to this point. I have only attempted to show that Urmson’s supererogatory classification of Francis’ preaching to the birds was wrong and that he never really had a chance to get it right due to the inadequacy of his scheme. My argument actually leaves open the possibility within Christian ethics that while there are individual duties, there may not be such a thing as acts of supererogation. Whether there is such a category as supererogation in Protestant ethics will be my focus in chapter three. My main objective has been to argue that no matter what you assume about Francis and the divine, Urmson was wrong to classify Francis’ preaching to the birds as supererogatory. As a corollary, I have also attempted to demonstrate that within Christian theology and practice, the additional classification of an individual duty is required to account for the full range of human action. Whether the name “individual duty” is fitting is of little consequence. The point is that the threefold and fourfold classificatory

⁷⁶ They are as follows: “*the obligatory, the morally optimal, the minimum morality demands, the supererogatory (action beyond the call), the morally optional, the morally indifferent, the morally significant and the permissibly sub-optimal.*” See McNamara, “Making Room,” 415. It is worth noting that though he names eight normative statuses, some are broader in nature and therefore subsume others. For example, he writes that supererogation is a subclass of “the morally optional.” Presumably, the “morally indifferent” is also a subclass of “the morally optional.” This suggests that there may not be eight distinct categories by which to classify an act though he obviously recommends more classifications than the threefold or fourfold classificatory schemes.

schemas are not hospitable to the type of act within Christian practice of which Francis' *preaching to the birds* is an example.⁷⁷

Gregory Mellema's Argument for Supererogation Using the Protestant Concept of Vocation

As suggested, the Protestant concept of vocation is well-suited to accommodate acts like Francis' preaching to the birds because it allows for what I am referring to as an "individual duty." Gregory Mellema employs this concept of vocation in an effort to suggest how theistic supererogationists and theistic anti-supererogationists might find common ground. He is one of the few philosophers to have engaged supererogation from a religious perspective since Urmson's essay in 1958, and what makes his contribution of unique importance to my project is that his suggestion is offered from a Protestant viewpoint.

Mellema begins by acknowledging that for many theists, there is "something powerfully wrong-headed about the idea that a supremely good God could make it morally permissible for his creatures to pass up opportunities to do that which is morally good."⁷⁸ Regarding this line of reasoning, he continues: "If it is God's intent that his creatures pursue the path of good and turn away from evil, for what possible reason would God not require of us that we take advantage of these opportunities?"⁷⁹ In moral philosophy, this conceptual connection between moral goodness and obligation is known as the "good-ought tie-up." As discussed in chapter one, the basic idea is that moral goodness entails obligation. This view logically rules out the possibility for acts of supererogation. This view was adopted by John Wesley although he did not employ language similar to that of moral philosophers. In his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Wesley writes:

⁷⁷ Again, this is assuming that God did in fact command Francis to preach to the birds. Whether he did or not, the argument still stands for those instances where God gives one individual a specific command to which no one else is obligated.

⁷⁸ Mellema, *Beyond the Call*, 149.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

Beware of sins of omission; lose no opportunity of doing good in any kind. Be zealous of good works; willingly omit no work, either of piety or mercy. Do all the good you possibly can to the bodies and souls of men. Particularly, "Thou shalt in any wise reprove thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." Be active. Give no place to indolence or sloth; give no occasion to say, "Ye are idle, ye are idle." Many will say so still; but let your whole spirit and behavior refute the slander. Be always employed; lose no shred of time; gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost.⁸⁰

It appears that for Wesley, to forego an act that is morally good is a sin of omission. Not only this, but omitting acts of moral goodness could lead to a backslidden state for the believer where God's perfection is neither embodied nor reflected as required (i.e., holiness). This would represent a breach in the pursuit of holiness. To state this differently, a Christian is deliberately choosing to settle for a lesser degree of holiness when they purposely refrain from doing a good work. Within Wesley's theological framework, how could this be labeled as anything but sin since after justification, the moral dimension of a person is "completely restored" (prior to justification, it was "completely destroyed), thus enabling a person to achieve Christian perfection.⁸¹ William Cannon makes a similar point, writing: "Wesley went so far as to claim that immediately on man's justification he was given by God the strength not to commit a known act of sin."⁸² This, according to Wesley's words, includes "sins of omission." The bottom line is that for Wesley, one must perform every good deed that presents.

For Christian theologians and ethicists that share a similar mindset with Wesley such as Joseph Allen, it is not difficult to see why they cannot find room for supererogation within Christian theology and practice. Joseph Allen is one

⁸⁰ Wesley, *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 112–113.

⁸¹ Irv Brendlinger and Eric E. Mueller, "Psychological Implications of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection with Special Reference to John Wesley's View," *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 60, no. 3 (2006): 278.

⁸² William Cannon, "John Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification and Perfection," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 35, no. 2 (1961): 94–95. The phrase "known act of sin" is probably what Jana Bennett means when she writes of Wesley's view of perfection: "[it] consists in being free from outward sin," as opposed to having perfect knowledge, never making a mistake in moral judgement, etc. See Jana M. Bennett, *Singleness and the Church: A New Theology of the Single Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 97.

such ethicist though his focus is more on covenantal love rather than holiness. In this book *Love and Conflict*, Allen argues that there is no place for supererogation in Protestant ethics. He is one of the few Protestant thinkers to interact with Urmson's example of the soldier throwing himself on a grenade to save his comrades. This in itself makes him interesting. Allen argues that Urmson's claim that the soldier's act of self-sacrifice to save his comrades was supererogatory is only accurate from the perspective of "ordinary conventional morality."⁸³ While it might be classified as a "second-mile action," this means two different things depending upon where you stand. From the vantage point of ordinary conventional morality, the act is considered "over and beyond what is ordinarily expected," and for this reason is a candidate for supererogation. However, this is not the case from a Christian perspective. From the perspective of covenantal love, the soldier's action is *not* "over and beyond what love requires" for the simple reason that *sacrifice* for the sake of another person's interests is at the heart of what it means to express God's covenantal love as required in an ethics of covenantal love. Consequently, Allen makes the following claim regarding the action of Urmson's soldier:

It is sometimes observed that we would not appropriately blame a person—one of the other soldiers, for example—for not being sacrificial in that way, but that we should especially praise someone who was. In contrast we *would* appropriately blame a soldier for not performing institutional duties—for going to sleep while on guard duty, for example; and we should certainly *not* praise one, at least not under ordinary circumstances, for staying awake. There is certainly an attraction in that way of thinking. From the standpoint of covenant love, however, there is something morally lacking, something that ought to be done, on the part of the soldiers who do not sacrifice their lives to save their comrades. Otherwise how are we to make sense of the note of command in Jesus's injunctions to turn the other cheek, go the second mile, and love the neighbor as the self?⁸⁴

The bottom line is that Allen's covenantal model of Christian ethics is very demanding and does not permit actions requiring a significant level of self-sacrifice to be classified as supererogatory, because expressing love, even

⁸³ Allen, *Love & Conflict*, 127.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 126–127.

when it is sacrificial, is part of what it means to love other people. In Allen's view, it is impossible for any act of love to go beyond what is required. Therefore, supererogatory acts are not possible because they do nothing more than fulfill God's command to love others. Thus, not to perform an act of sacrificial love because of the cost to ourselves is to sin because in that moment, we have prioritized ourselves above another.

Along with John Wesley, Joseph Allen implicitly endorses the "good-ought tie-up." However, while Gregory Mellema does not directly address the good-ought tie-up, he implicitly rejects the principle in his discussion of how Protestants might make space for supererogation.

Gregory Mellema's Argument

Mellema attempts to bridge the gap between the theistic proponents and theistic opponents of supererogation by introducing the Protestant concept of vocation. Mellema writes:

The basic idea, as it has evolved primarily in Protestant thought, is that God calls his creatures into various areas of work or service. It is part of God's plan that his purposes on earth be brought about or realized through the efforts of his creatures, and each of his creatures is called to a particular area of service.⁸⁵

As stated in the previous section, another term that is sometimes used interchangeably for the Protestant concept of *vocation* is "calling." In Protestant thought, a calling is not ultimately a product of psychical activity although it will manifest itself psychologically. Rather, the call indicates that there is not only a "callee" hearing the call, but a caller.⁸⁶ Christians identify this caller as God. Whether it be a teenager at a summer youth camp or an adult in a Sunday morning service, it is common within Protestant Christianity to hear a preacher exhort individuals to seek God's direction, or calling, for their life. Normally, this is viewed as a much more noble and life-comprehensive task than merely

⁸⁵ Mellema, *Beyond the Call*, 150.

⁸⁶ Max L. Stackhouse, "Vocation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics*, ed. Gilbert Meilaender and William Werpehowski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 190.

acquiring instructions for any given situation. Rather, an individual approaches God in prayer with the question, “What have you put me on earth to do?” It is the kind of question that resembles the following question that Paul asked when Jesus revealed himself on the road to Damascus: “What am I to do, Lord?”⁸⁷ God then responds: “Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do.”⁸⁸ In terms of vocation, God called Paul to be an apostle. At the very beginning of his letter to the Romans and in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul includes the phrase: “called to be an apostle.”⁸⁹ On four other occasions, he begins his letter with the phrase: “an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.”⁹⁰ And in 1 Timothy 1:1, he describes himself as: “an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope.” By comparing these salutations, it is clear that while God’s will for Paul was to serve as an apostle, this objective fact was experienced by Paul as a “calling” (i.e., vocation) and “command.” The importance of including the reference to command is that command is often viewed as obligatory and a calling is viewed as more of an invitation.⁹¹ However, Paul appears to believe that his calling was not only an invitation to partner with God, but a command of God, and to refuse the calling would be an act of disobedience. God had a specific vocation for Paul and there is no reason to think that this is not the same for every Christian. In addition to God’s general commands that are applicable to all, there is a specific calling—all “rank[ing] the same with God, none more sacred, none more secular than others, no matter how they are ranked by men”⁹²—awaiting discovery for each individual Christian.

One of the clearest examples of vocation or individual calling is found in Jeremiah. Early in Jeremiah’s life, God tells him: “Before I formed you in the

⁸⁷ Acts 22:10.

⁸⁸ Acts 22:11.

⁸⁹ Rom. 1:1 and 1 Cor. 1:1.

⁹⁰ 2 Cor. 1:1, Eph. 1:1, Col. 1:1, and 2 Tim. 1:1.

⁹¹ Regarding the idea of “calling,” Robert Adams admits that he is more comfortable viewing it as an invitation rather than a command because of his understanding of “Christian liberty.” See Adams, “Vocation,” 451.

⁹² Paul Ramsey, *The Essential Paul Ramsey*, ed. William Werpehowski and Stephen D. Crocco (London: Yale University Press, 1994), 41.

womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”⁹³ This word from the Lord indicated that prior to *conception* (i.e., not just birth),⁹⁴ God knew that Jeremiah would exist and had already determined his vocation (i.e. a prophet). In contradistinction to Jean-Paul Sartre’s atheistic humanism, this predetermined vocation can be expressed in the following terms: *Jeremiah’s essence was determined prior to his existence.*⁹⁵

In relation to this individual calling, Mellema points out the following belief that normally accompanies this particular view of vocation:

God endows us with talents and abilities in the light of the vocation to which we are called. And since the carrying out of his designs requires a multiplicity of persons in differing areas of service, God endows people with differing talents and abilities. Having decided upon the purposes to be realized through the collective efforts of his creatures on earth, God calls his creatures to a variety of vocations and equips each with the appropriate abilities to engage in the assigned vocation with adequate success.⁹⁶

Within this framework of vocation, Mellema’s discussion of supererogation is straightforward. In the area of one’s vocation, God expects more due to the fact that God himself has uniquely equipped the individual to serve others in

⁹³ Jer. 1:5.

⁹⁴ Identifying something akin to personhood prior to conception is a radical move. In today’s abortion debate that largely hinges upon when a zygote or embryo or fetus is considered a human person, conservative evangelical Christians argue that a human being exists from the moment of conception. Here, God tells Jeremiah that his person and calling (i.e., vocation) already existed in his mind before conception. Though this is not relevant to my thesis, it is a point worthy of mentioning due to its relevance to an important moral issue today.

⁹⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre was one of the most famous (along with Albert Camus) existentialist philosophers and atheists. One of the expressions that he is most famous for is “existence precedes essence.” See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Methuen & Co., 1966), 28. Sartre writes: “Atheistic existentialism . . . declares with greater consistency that if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man . . . See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, 27–28. Because he did not believe in God, there was nothing that existed which could give human beings any grand meaning (i.e., metanarrative) prior to their existence. If a human being wants meaning, they have no choice but to create it. David Heyd refers to this view of meaning as a “modern, post-Nietzschean [conception] of life,” a view that “consists of numerous goals (or plans), but as a whole it does not have a goal (or a plan).” See David Heyd and Franklin G. Miller, “Life Plans: Do They Give Meaning to Our Lives?”, *The Monist* 93, no. 1 (Jan. 2010): 21.

⁹⁶ Mellema, *Beyond the Call*, 150.

that particular way. This “equipping” might include any combination of factors such as skills, talents, a strong desire to perform related activities, a complementary personality type for the appropriate tasks, relevant knowledge and insight, an intuitive ability to discern what needs to be done from one situation to the next, and the like. The point is that because the individual is both *called* and *equipped* by God to serve God, the church, and others most effectively in a specific area, more is expected of that individual in every situation where an opportunity to do the sort of good that corresponds to that area arises. Mellema even suggests that it might be the case that God’s expectations are so high in the area of our vocation that it might be *impossible* to supererogate in that area of our calling.⁹⁷

Conversely, there will be a multitude of areas in which an individual is not particularly well-equipped to serve. This is not to be used as an excuse to abstain from doing good in areas outside of one’s calling. However, God’s expectations for an individual outside the area of their vocation may be less in comparison with his expectations for the individual when faced with opportunities to do good that are more closely related to their individual calling. For example, pretend that there are three houses side-by-side. In the middle house lives a child named John who cannot read even though he is of reading age. If he does not learn to read soon, his chances of future success will quickly diminish. In the house to the right lives a man who dropped out of school when he was 14 and has worked on his father’s shrimping boats for several decades. In the house to the left, there lives a woman who is an elementary school teacher. Both the shrimp boat man and the school teacher live very busy lives and their work requires a good deal of time. According to Mellema’s suggestion, the vocation of each neighbor could play a role in determining the classification of the particular act of taking time to help teach John to read. If the shrimp boat man attempts to teach the child to read, it might be the case (though not necessarily) that he supererogates, whereas if the schoolteacher helps, she does not. Why? Because helping children learn

⁹⁷ Ibid., 151–152.

to read falls directly in the wheelhouse of responsibilities that characterize the vocation of a schoolteacher. In addition, she will possess more knowledge and be more skilled in tailoring an individualized tutoring plan that will serve John best. Along these lines, Mellema writes:

I have many opportunities to be of service both inside and outside the area of my vocation, but with respect to the latter my taking advantage of these opportunities is sometimes morally optional. Outside the bounds of my vocation I am not required to go the extra mile on every occasion, and when I elect to go the extra mile there is a genuine possibility of performing an act of supererogation.⁹⁸

While not lowering God's moral standard too much, Mellema finds a way to make moral space for supererogation. Ultimately, this suggestion is meant to help theistic anti-supererogationists reconsider their position since there might be a way of allowing for supererogation while still not compromising God's high moral demands. This is, after all, the main concern of anti-supererogationists: *that supererogation is nothing more than a "device that allows people to escape the rigors of the moral life."*⁹⁹

It is important to mention that a person can adopt the Protestant notion of vocation without committing themselves to a pro-supererogation position.¹⁰⁰ It could be the case that the *moral good* always entails *ought* regardless of whether the opportunity to do good is within or outside the bounds of one's God-designated vocation. Mellema acknowledges that this is possible, but goes on to write:

Rather, it is my suggestion that this notion [of vocation] makes possible an alternative point of view which takes seriously many of the theistic anti-supererogationist's concerns about a supremely good God with high expectations of his creatures and yet recognizes that in certain areas of their lives these creatures are capable of performing acts of supererogation.¹⁰¹

The strength of his view is evident. While Mellema's view carves out a niche for supererogation within Protestant ethics, it does not do so at the cost of

⁹⁸ Ibid., 153.

⁹⁹ Gregory Mellema, "Alternative Acts and the Demands of Morality," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 38 (2004): 453.

¹⁰⁰ Mellema, *Beyond the Call*, 153.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 153.

diluting God's high expectations of his creatures. The holiness of God is not impugned, and his holy expectations are not diminished. God's moral expectations remain extremely high for each human being and are slightly loosened when opportunities to go the extra mile fall outside the bounds of the individual's vocation. For the theistic anti-supererogationist who is primarily concerned with God's expectations and standards for his creatures being diminished, it is important to note that a person will still have duties to perform outside their particular vocation in addition to the very high moral standards that still apply in the area of their vocation. All Mellema is suggesting is that outside those bounds, it is when going the extra mile that acts of supererogation are possible.

The value of Mellema's argument cannot be overstated. As indicated earlier, he offers the most thorough case in favor of supererogation in Protestant ethics. However, for all of its strengths, a specific act is never mentioned. Although this should not be viewed as a failure on his part, it remains to be seen whether Protestant ethics can take the next step and actually identify one or more specific acts that are supererogatory. Opening the door to supererogation is one thing; stepping through the door and pinpointing an actual act is another. Granted, Mellema has named specific acts of supererogation elsewhere. For example, on one occasion he writes about a lady named Margaret who has a duty to give \$100 to the local broadcast facility as a result of a previous pledge. However, when it comes time to give, she is caught up in a "spirit of generosity" and gives \$250 instead.¹⁰² This act simultaneously "fulfills a duty and goes beyond the fulfillment of duty."¹⁰³ Leaving no room for doubt, Mellema goes on to write: "It is an act, I believe, which deserves to be classified as an act of supererogation."¹⁰⁴ In this example, he is clearly writing from the perspective of a moral philosopher rather than as a Christian ethicist. This observation is not meant as a criticism

¹⁰² Gregory Mellema, "Supererogation and the Fulfillment of Duty," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 25 (1991): 171–172.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 172.

of his view, but only as an acknowledgement that after my criticism of Urmson for his failed attempt to correctly classify Francis' act, one must not be too hasty in assuming that because an act is thought to be supererogatory in moral philosophy, then it will be so in Protestant ethics as well. Mark Wynn's essay makes this all too clear. My only point is to provide support for my earlier claim that Mellema never provides a specific example of supererogation in Protestant ethics. He would probably say that Margaret's act is supererogatory whether she performs it as a Protestant Christian or not. Although I agree, it still is important to say that it is not necessarily so and for this reason, her act should be regarded as only a suggestion by Mellema of an act of supererogation in Protestant ethics. For this reason, it remains to be seen whether a particular act can be classified as supererogatory in Protestant ethics.

Three Acts of Supererogation: Joel and Paul Feinberg's View

Joel and Paul Feinberg take the next step and identify certain acts as supererogatory. It is worth pointing out that they do not argue for acts of supererogation in Protestant ethics. Rather, they simply assume that such acts are possible and proceed to offer a few examples. I will now conclude the chapter by discussing the three individual acts that they believe to be supererogatory.

The first act that the Feinbergs identify as supererogatory is choosing to free a prisoner who is scheduled to be executed by offering oneself in their place.¹⁰⁵ Concerning this act, they write: "It would be a great sacrifice for me to do so, but am I required to make this sacrifice? It is hard to imagine that either Christian or non-Christian ethicists would say I am obligated to do this."¹⁰⁶ They do not spend much time arguing their case, but instead trust that it would be difficult to find an ethicist that would classify this act as a duty. Besides the particular act, their proposal suggests that supererogation in its

¹⁰⁵ Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 25.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

basic form is the same in Christian ethics as it is in non-Christian ethics (i.e., whatever form that may take) in that it is characterized by the following three criteria: (1) not obligatory, (2) not forbidden, and (3) possessing moral worth. However, they also write that these criteria alone are not sufficient for classifying acts because motivations and intentions are not emphasized.¹⁰⁷ I will refrain from commenting further on this aspect of their view until chapter four.

The second act that the Feinbergs present as supererogatory is when a woman chooses to raise a child that is the result of rape or non-consensual incest. They write:

because the sex and resultant pregnancy are involuntary, the woman involved does not have a responsibility to raise this child. That is, since raising the child will significantly burden the rest of her life, and because this added burden and responsibility were forced on her against her will, it is not her duty to raise the child. Of course, if she chooses to raise the child anyway, she is permitted to do so. Doing so under such circumstances would be an act of supererogation, that is, a deed that goes beyond the call of duty and thus is morally praiseworthy as an act of great sacrifice.¹⁰⁸

At first glance, this appears to be an implicit endorsement of a woman's right to abort the fetus. However, this is not the Feinbergs' position. They write that if the same woman chooses not to raise the child, she can avoid aborting the baby by offering it up for adoption. The issue of abortion aside, the Feinbergs appear to be saying that there may come a point when the level of sacrifice that accompanies an act is so great that the act can no longer be considered obligatory. The problem with such thinking is that not everyone would agree. For example, could it not be argued that if the woman does not have an obligation to raise the child, neither should she be obligated to put her body through the nine-month, rigorous process of nurturing a fetus and then experiencing the pain of child-birth? The real question is, "Where do you draw the line?" According to the Feinbergs' argument, why does the victimized woman's freedom only begin once the child is born? And if they want to make

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 21.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 130.

this argument, then what justification can be given for drawing such a line in the moral sand? Presumably, the reason is that the embryo or fetus is deemed a person from their Protestant evangelical perspective and no matter how the person originated, it is a person now and deserves to be given equal rights and protection under law as any other human being that has been born. This is most evident in their statement: “We agree that after victimizing the woman by rape or non-consensual incest it is neither right or necessary to victimize her again by requiring her to raise the child. But neither is it right to victimize the child by requiring that he or she loses his or her life.”¹⁰⁹ Wayne Grudem makes this point as well. He writes:

But once again the question must be asked: Would we think it right to kill a baby conceived through rape or incest after it is born? Most people would say certainly not. Such a child does not lose its right to live because of the circumstances of its conception. Therefore, we should not think it right to kill the child before it is born either. The rape that occurred was not the fault of the child, and the child should not be put to death because of someone else’s crime.¹¹⁰

This explains why the Feinbergs draw the line of freedom where they do. Because the embryo or fetus is considered a person, the victimized woman must give birth, but this does not require her to be the one that raises the child. Having explained their view, it should be clearer now why they think that a victimized woman performs an act of supererogation when she chooses to raise the child herself.

Although the Feinbergs make a strong case for this second act being supererogatory, all one must do to call the supererogatory status of the act into question is to challenge their position on whether an embryo or fetus is actually a person or to make a case that whatever the status, this should never take precedence over a woman’s reproductive rights to determine what she wants to do with her body and her future. I now want to mention the third act that the Feinbergs claim is supererogatory. The Feinbergs have us imagine a scenario where a pregnant woman finds out that she has a type of cancer that will

¹⁰⁹ Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 130.

¹¹⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018): 575.

eventually result in her death if it goes untreated during the gestation period. At this point, the alternatives are clear: either she begins treatment to save her own life even though this will terminate the life of the fetus, or she foregoes treatment to save the life of the fetus even though it will cost her own life.¹¹¹ Concerning the first option, they write that it is morally permissible for the mother to commence treatment. They reason:

we believe that there are principles that justify taking the baby's life in these cases, if the mother chooses. One is that if it is possible to do good to someone else without endangering or harming oneself, one is obligated to do so; otherwise there is no obligation. As applied to these kinds of cases, this rule means the mother is not morally required to give up her life to save that of the baby.¹¹²

The Feinbergs go on to say that although the mother is not required to give up her life, she can choose to do so with the intent of saving the baby. Using the real-life case of Rita Fedrizzi who was faced with this tragic dilemma in 2004–2005 (not to mention that she already had two children and had to take them into account in her decision), they tell the story of how Rita made the decision to forego treatment. She gave birth and died within a few months. In response to this act, the Feinbergs write: “what she did was an act of supererogation (beyond the call of duty), a heroic act. Such an act of courage and love is morally praiseworthy and certainly morally permissible, but she was not morally obligated to make that decision.”¹¹³ The choice of the mother to sacrifice her life so that the baby can live is the third act that the Feinbergs classify as supererogatory.

Of the three acts that the Feinbergs mention as examples of supererogation, this last one seems to be the least contestable for two reasons. To begin with, the first act that is mentioned seems more akin to a thought experiment than an event that could transpire in real life. In the United States, a person is not legally permitted to be executed in someone's place in

¹¹¹ The reasoning behind this latter option is that if she foregoes treatment, by the time she gives birth, the cancer would have progressed to the point that the treatment would be ineffective.

¹¹² Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 139.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 139.

states that still permit capital punishment. This is not to say that the hypothetical situation is not useful and that the act might not be supererogatory, but I think this is a poor example because it is difficult to imagine this situation actually occurring. The second reason is that the supererogatory status of the second act is questionable once you consider the perspective of theologians and ethicists outside the Protestant evangelical tradition. These two reasons are why the last of the three acts that the Feinberg's mention is the best candidate of the three for supererogation.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by arguing that Urmson misclassified Francis' *preaching to the birds* because he failed to consider what Mark Wynn labels, "the theological context." Because Urmson did not entertain the notion that the God of Christianity might have commanded Francis to preach to the birds, he had no choice but to classify Francis' act as either merely permissible (i.e., a morally neutral act) or supererogatory. In the absence of God speaking, a merely permissible classification would have been more accurate than his supererogatory classification. Ultimately, I argue that whether God spoke to Francis or not, his act cannot be classified as supererogatory. After arguing this point, I suggest that an "individual duty" could be a helpful deontic category in Protestant ethics to account for the type of act that is obligatory for one but not all.

Next, I presented Mellema's proposal as to how supererogation might be accommodated based on the Protestant doctrine of vocation. Contrary to Urmson, Mellema rightfully considers the theological context of an act when he utilizes the doctrine of vocation. With his proposal, Mellema hopes to strike a compromise between pro-supererogationists and anti-supererogationists in Christian theology. His proposal seeks to affirm the possibility of supererogation while "[taking] seriously many of the theistic anti-supererogationist's concerns about a supremely good God with high

expectations of his creatures.”¹¹⁴ The value of his proposal is that he asserts the possibility of supererogatory acts in Protestant ethics in a way that does not challenge the *sola gratia* and *sola fide* doctrine of justification.

This chapter concludes with a discussion of three acts that the Feinbergs’ believe are supererogatory. Of the three, the third act—a pregnant woman who chooses to forego treatment for a type of cancer that will eventually result in her death if it goes untreated during the gestation period so that she can avoid aborting a fetus—is the strongest candidate for supererogation. However, although all three acts are a valuable contribution, no systematic argument is offered. The possibility of supererogation is assumed, and then three specific acts are identified. Furthermore, none of their supererogatory acts are grounded in the Bible. Though this is not a problem, a robust account of supererogation in Protestant ethics needs to be able to offer biblical support for the possibility and role of supererogation. In the next chapter, I argue that there is an act of supererogation in the New Testament. It appears to have been overlooked by the few thinkers that have engaged supererogation from a Protestant perspective. In line with the pro-supererogationist attitude of Mellema and the Feinbergs who both write from a Protestant perspective, I will now turn my attention to the particular act.

¹¹⁴ Mellema, *Beyond the Call of Duty*, 153.

§ 3. An Instance of Supererogation in the New Testament

Chapter one consisted of a general overview of the concept of supererogation, the religious origins of the concept, the more recent interest in moral philosophy since J.O. Urmson's landmark article in 1958, and a thorough yet not exhaustive survey of some of the more central issues revolving around supererogation that are found in the literature. As stated toward the end of chapter one, Gregory Mellema opened the door for a reevaluation of supererogation in Protestant theology and ethics with the following insight:

There is no contradiction in affirming that a person can never be judged righteous in God's eyes on the basis of works alone and affirming at the same time that a person can perform acts of supererogation. For an act whose performance fulfils no duty and is yet praiseworthy may still fall short of justifying a person in God's eyes.¹

With the question of supererogation decoupled from the doctrine of justification, Protestants can entertain the possibility of supererogation without committing to a doctrine of justification that is in part dependent upon the performance of meritorious deeds. This is vital because in the Reformer's *sola gratia, sola fide* doctrine of justification, good works do not have any power to justify a person before God, so any account of supererogation in Protestant ethics must take this into consideration.

In chapter two, I demonstrated that to discover whether there is a place for supererogation in Protestant ethics, we must take the broader theological context into account when assessing acts and types of acts. Evidence for this claim was provided by arguing that Urmson wrongly classified Francis' act because he failed to consider its broader theological context. I then argued that the classification of an individual duty can do what none of Urmson's classifications could, and that this classification is best understood through the Protestant concept of vocation. This opened the door to an in-depth look at Mellema's pro-supererogation proposal. The chapter concluded with three

¹ Mellema, *Beyond the Call*, 52.

specific acts that John and Paul Feinberg claim are supererogatory, noting that although significant, none was taken directly from the New Testament.²

In this chapter, I defend the unorthodox view that there is at least one act of supererogation in Protestant theology and ethics. Going a step further than Mellema's general theory and the Feinbergs' three examples, I work directly from the New Testament to argue that one act of supererogation in particular is commended in the Gospel of Matthew. This is as follows: *choosing to remain married to an adulterous spouse in an effort to reconcile and prevent divorce*. Considering that different people have different ideas of what constitutes adultery, I will use the following definition for the purpose of this chapter: "voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and someone other than that person's current spouse or partner."³ This simple statement provides a clear, objective definition that eliminates the potential for confusion due to various distinctions such as "emotional adultery"⁴ and "visual adultery" (pornography, etc.) that are also associated with the more general term "adultery." Although these distinctions are important and relevant to Christian ethics as well, I will not be treating them in this chapter. In addition, neither will I address alternative arrangements where two marriage partners agree to a threesome, partner swapping, or group sex since, as Dennis Hollinger writes, "the biblical commandment regarding adultery precludes [them]."⁵ My only goal in this chapter is to demonstrate the much broader point

² This is not meant to be a criticism of their view. Rather, this point is made only to call attention to my proposal which will focus on an act that is described in the Gospel of Matthew.

³ "Adultery." Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/adultery>.

⁴ Dr. Abigail Brenner compares "platonic relationships" with "emotional affairs." While platonic relationships are described as healthy, emotional affairs are not. She writes: "An emotional affair describes a relationship where the level of emotional intimacy is excessive and where the level of emotion invested in someone outside of the marriage infringes upon the intimacy between spouses or committed partners." This is what I have in mind when I use the term, "emotional adultery." See Abigail Brenner, "6 Signs That Your Spouse Is Having an Emotional Affair," *Psychology Today*, March 17, 2019, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/in-flux/201903/6-signs-your-spouse-is-having-emotional-affair>.

⁵ Dennis P. Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 169.

that there is a good example of supererogation in Protestant ethics in the New Testament.

While celibacy is often embraced as the quintessential supererogatory deed in Roman Catholic theology, this is much less likely from a Protestant perspective that hinges upon the notion of vocation. As will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter, even Karl Rahner—one of the best known Roman Catholic theologians of the 20th century—defended the idea that marriage, not just celibacy, is a vocation to which one is called (as opposed to the view that marriage is the inferior path for the majority of people who cannot find it within themselves to be celibate in their service to God). For this reason, focusing upon the implied act of choosing to remain married to an adulterous spouse in an effort to reconcile and prevent divorce is a less difficult path (and therefore more promising) to traverse in an effort to demonstrate that there is an example of supererogation in the New Testament. After using the basic criteria for supererogation in moral philosophy⁶ to analyze this act, I will argue that having the proper motive when performing the act is also required for the deed to count as supererogatory. This additional criterion—the motive component—will be addressed in chapter four in both general fashion and in relation to this specific act.

This chapter is divided into three sections, which will then be followed by a conclusion: (1) A Life of Celibacy: *Supererogatory?*, (2) Remaining and Reconciling with an Adulterous Spouse, and (3) Two Additional Scenarios. In the first section, I suggest that celibacy—named by Aquinas as one of three counsels—is not so clearly a case of supererogation when viewed through the Protestant doctrine of vocation.⁷ In doing so, I introduce Melancthon's affirmation of celibacy as the sole counsel. This exercise is valuable for two reasons. First, it helps clarify Melancthon's conception of a counsel since he represents a rare moment in Protestant history when a counsel (i.e., the

⁶ The act is (1) not obligatory, (2) not forbidden, and (3) possesses moral worth.

⁷ There is a close relationship between Aquinas' counsels and acts of supererogation in moral philosophy. Although not perfectly analogous, counsels have been described as "supererogatory" in more recent times.

spiritual equivalent to an act of supererogation in moral philosophy) is affirmed as such. Secondly, Melancthon's conception of a counsel leads to a discussion of an alternative, vocation-based view of celibacy that challenges the notion that celibacy is supererogatory. In the second section of this chapter, I argue that choosing to remain married to an adulterous spouse in an effort to reconcile and prevent divorce is supererogatory. This second section is organized as follows: (i) theological commitments that I am making for the sake of the argument; (ii) the argument itself. In the third section, I will address the following two questions concerning two distinct yet related acts in conjunction with the act discussed in section two: (i) In the case that the innocent spouse wants to remain and reconcile, is the choice by the guilty spouse to remain and reconcile—which will obviously require genuine repentance—also supererogatory? (ii) If both partners in a marriage commit adultery,⁸ does this alter the classificatory status of the act addressed in section two assuming both partners are repentant and want to salvage the marriage? After attempting to answer this question, I will conclude with a few remarks concerning grace (i.e., unmerited favor).

A Life of Celibacy: *Supererogatory*?

Thomas Aquinas wrote that counsels represent a “better and more expeditious” method of securing “eternal blessedness.”⁹ He named three in particular: (1) the counsel of perpetual poverty, (2) the counsel of perpetual chastity,¹⁰ and (3) the counsel of obedience. Each was said to counter one of three worldly goods so that the “good” did not become the final end for which

⁸ The term “double-adultery” will be used henceforth to denote a situation in which both marriage partners are simultaneously guilty of adultery. This definition is helpful in distinguishing my use of the term from how the term is used in the American legal system. In the American legal context, double-adultery is used in contrast to single-adultery to indicate that both of the individuals involved in the act are married. In this context, I use the term to signify that each spouse in the marriage has committed adultery (i.e., two acts of adultery).

⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* lallae, q. 108, a. 4, ad 1, vol. 30 (Oxford: Blackfriars, 1972), 61, 63.

¹⁰ The phrase “perpetual chastity” is synonymous with “virginity.” The two are used interchangeably in this passage.

an individual strove. The soteriological component in Aquinas' counsels was the reason for the Reformers' wholehearted rejection of counsels. This component of good works is evident when Aquinas writes that fulfilling the commandments is "necessary in order to reach the end of eternal blessedness."¹¹ Furthermore, counsels represent those acts which possess the power to secure eternal blessedness in a more efficacious manner, which directly contradicts the Reformers' *sola gratia, sola fide* doctrine of justification. Sarah Mortimer writes: "From Luther onwards, Protestants came to see God's standards for human beings in absolute terms, rejecting any suggestion that there were 'counsels of perfection', or good works which were optional rather than obligatory."¹² As explained in the previous chapter, John Wesley is another example of a Protestant who rejected the possibility of supererogation. He appears to endorse what Horgan and Timmons refer to as the "good-ought tie-up"¹³ although he did not address the topic of precepts, counsels, or supererogation specifically. Some of Wesley's phrases such as "lose no opportunity of doing good," "willingly omit no work," and "Do all the good you possibly can"¹⁴ provide strong support for the idea that Wesley did not believe that there could be a good work that is non-obligatory. His position is reminiscent of Luther's opening line in *A Treatise on Good Works*: "The first thing to know is that there are no good works except those works God has commanded . . ."¹⁵ The point is that whether we consider the views of 16th century Reformers or the views of Wesley, an 18th century revivalist responsible for the birth of Methodism, Mortimer is correct to say that from Luther onwards, Protestants have rejected the possibility of supererogation.

Philip Melancthon's Affirmation of One Counsel: Celibacy

¹¹ Ibid., 61.

¹² Sarah Mortimer, "Counsels of Perfection and Reformation Political Thought," *The Historical Journal* (2018): 1.

¹³ Horgan and Timmons, "Untying a Knot," 30.

¹⁴ Wesley, *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 112–113.

¹⁵ Luther, *A Treatise on Good Works*, 23.

However, there is one exception. Philip Melanchthon broke with the Reformers concerning one act in particular. He writes: “But there *is* a counsel found in the Gospels, and this is the only one as far as I know—*celibacy*.”¹⁶ Interestingly, Mortimer never mentions this concession. While she rightly affirms that Melanchthon “added his voice to the assault upon counsels”¹⁷ on a general level, she appears to have overlooked the fact that Melanchthon did make one exception in *Loci Communes 1521*.¹⁸ Later in the same article, she writes:

The natural and moral law which underpins our political societies demands full obedience, for Melanchthon; there is no space above or beyond that law for acts of supererogation or of specifically religious virtue. Like Luther, Melanchthon denied that the moral law was a permissive law, but instead saw it as prescribing and commanding all acts of virtue—which must be done in the right spirit of love and faith.¹⁹

In an effort to give Mortimer the benefit of the doubt, it could be said that she recognizes that what Melanchthon meant by the word “counsel” and what Aquinas meant was completely different. Therefore, if she is answering the question, “Did Melanchthon affirm a counsel according to how Aquinas conceives of it?” then the answer is an obvious no. This would justify her failure to mention this one exception. Whatever we make of her view, it is important to state that Melanchthon clearly affirmed that there is one example of a counsel in the New Testament. Yet, as previously implied, this assertion is not as straightforward as it may first appear because there is no evidence that Melanchthon’s conception of a counsel resembled Aquinas’. What complicates the attempt to clearly discern what Melanchthon meant by the term “counsel” in *Loci Communes 1521* is that he did not clearly define the term, which could give the impression that he might agree with Aquinas when he writes that celibacy is a counsel. However, one of Melanchthon’s statements clearly shows this impression to be false: “But is it not because of celibacy that you

¹⁶ Philip Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1521*, trans. Christian Preus (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2014), 73.

¹⁷ Mortimer, “Counsels of Perfection and Reformation Political Thought,” 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

argue whether counsels are superior to commandments? These are the absurdities of the Scholastics, who do not understand what a commandment is or what a counsel is.”²⁰ Although the last statement does not provide a positive definition or list of criteria similar to that which we have for supererogation in moral philosophy, it at least shows that Melanchthon does not view a counsel in the exact same manner as Aquinas and the Scholastics. If he had, then this would have committed him to a doctrine of justification that, in the view of the reformers, was unbiblical and therefore heretical.

Although Melanchthon does not explicitly define the terms in *Loci Communes 1521*, he does do so in *Loci Communes 1555* when addressing some of the teachings of the Anabaptists and monks.²¹ He writes:

A commandment is so called because it speaks of necessary obedience. Everything that is contrary to the commandments is sin, and this brings eternal punishment if man is not converted to God.

A counsel is a doctrine, not a commandment; it does not demand a work, even though it praises the work as blameless and useful.²²

In conjunction with some of what Melanchthon wrote in *Loci Communes 1521*, the above passage is of great value for establishing a basic set of criteria that according to Melanchthon, constitute a counsel. Before doing so, it is important to show where Aquinas and Melanchthon differ in order to eliminate any impression that the two are in agreement.

At no point does Melanchthon suggest that celibacy or any other act could aid an individual in their quest to—as Aquinas states—reach the end of eternal blessedness. In other words, it plays no role in the justification of a person before God. The inability of a counsel to serve a justificatory role in the

²⁰ Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1521*, 73.

²¹ This is pure speculation, but it could be the case that Melanchthon did not have time to further develop this section about counsels (and other sections as well) due to the fact that he had to publish *Loci Communes 1521* before he was ready. Clyde Manschreck points out that some of his students “printed and widely distributed his lecture notes on Romans” and because Melanchthon was “unable to recall these notes, [he] resolved to print the material in a more acceptable form.” See Clyde L. Manschreck, *Melanchthon: The Quiet Reformer* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1958), 82.

²² Philip Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1555*, in *Melanchthon on Christian Doctrine: Loci Communes 1555*, trans. and ed. Clyde L. Manschreck (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1965), 130.

life of a person performing the deed is the irreconcilable difference that forever separates Melanchthon from Aquinas. As mentioned earlier, Melanchthon breaks with Luther and Calvin (whose views would obviously be expressed later) when he affirms that there is at least one counsel. However, it will become clear that while his position concerning counsels places him at odds with other Reformers, this is not as significant as it might initially seem for the simple reason that he at no point suggests that the performance of a counsel can help a person earn God's forgiveness and subsequent righteousness and thereby secure "eternal blessedness." In other words, Melanchthon seems to affirm the possibility of a counsel while simultaneously denying that a counsel has any justificatory power. Due to the importance of this last point, I want to briefly discuss Melanchthon's position on justification in more detail in order to convincingly demonstrate that his view of a counsel is, as it pertains to the doctrine of justification, diametrically opposed to Aquinas'. I will then conclude the discussion of Melanchthon's conception of a counsel by showing that the attributes he assigns to a counsel match the three standard criteria that characterize a supererogatory act in moral philosophy. Together, these two exercises represent a concerted effort to show that Melanchthon's treatment of celibacy as a counsel foreshadows Mellema's pivotal insight that it is possible in Protestant ethics for there to be a supererogatory act that does not contribute in any way to the justification of a person performing the act.

Melanchthon and the Doctrine of Justification

The doctrine of justification is a topic that Melanchthon wrote on throughout his entire life due to the central role it occupied in the Reformation.²³ Sachiko Kusakawa writes: "[Melanchthon] was always at pains to point out that controlling external actions did not merit salvation."²⁴ In *Loc*

²³ Michael Rogness makes this point, writing: "Without doubt, Melanchthon considered justification the critical center of evangelical faith." See See Michael Rogness, *Philip Melanchthon: Reformer Without Honor* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969), 105.

²⁴ Sachiko Kusakawa, *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy: The Case of Philip Melanchthon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 72.

Communes 1521, Melanchthon attacks Aquinas and the Scholastics for their view that merit can be earned through certain external acts for the purpose of securing eternal life with God. One of the reasons for this is that according to Melanchthon, a person cannot perform a virtuous or righteous deed prior to salvation and the subsequent indwelling of the Holy Spirit.²⁵ The primary reason he offers in support of this claim is the corruption of the human heart due to original sin and the resultant inability to perform a genuinely meritorious deed without divine assistance. For Melanchthon, the “heart’s inner disposition”²⁶ plays a crucial role in determining whether an act is righteous, and he did not think that a person without the Spirit could have a proper disposition even if they are able to perform the external act. Basically, Melanchthon reasoned that apart from the Spirit’s assistance, a person cannot help but to act selfishly and this includes the performance of deeds that *appear* good. Considering this last point, he mentions three motivations that are rooted in self-love: (1) performing an act to gain fame, (2) performing an act to feel self-satisfied, and (3) performing an act to garner the praise of human beings. The first two he attributes to Socrates and the latter he attributes to Cato, who followed the teachings of Stoicism.²⁷ It might seem odd that he introduces the philosophers at this point. However, his reason is clear: he believes that there is a strong similarity between the way that the ancient Greek philosophers viewed virtuous acts and the way that Aquinas and the Scholastics viewed virtuous—or meritorious—acts.²⁸ Melanchthon continues: “Philosophy looks at nothing but the facades that men exhibit. Holy Scripture perceives the innermost affections.²⁹ This is why he says earlier that the “constancy of Socrates, integrity in Xenocrates, [and] self-control of Zeno” are only “shadows

²⁵ Cf. Luther, *A Treatise on Good Works*, 25–26, 38.

²⁶ Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1521*, 45.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁸ Melanchthon makes this same point in article IV (titled “Of Justification”) of the Apology. He writes: “Here the scholastics have followed the philosophers. Thus, they teach only the righteousness of reason—that is, civil works—and maintain that without the Holy Spirit reason can love God above all things.” See Philip Melanchthon, “Apology of the Augsburg Confession,” in *The Book of Concord*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert and Jaroslav Pelikan (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1959), 108.

²⁹ Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1521*, 43.

of virtue.”³⁰ In his view, these philosophers performed their deeds out of “their esteem and love [for] themselves”³¹ although the acts appeared externally to be noble and virtuous. After all, these philosophers did not have the Holy Spirit and for this reason, their behaviors must have proceeded from motives that were ultimately products of the “flesh”—“everything in us foreign to the Holy Spirit”³²—and for this reason, were not righteous.

As just mentioned, Melanchthon defines “flesh” as “everything in us foreign to the Holy Spirit” and went as far as to say that this includes “the highest powers of human nature and its noblest endeavors.”³³ Concerning what Melanchthon perceives to be a justification-related focus on virtue by both ancient Greek philosophers and Aquinas and the Scholastics, E.P. Meijering writes:

The most important aspect of God’s will is that God wants to justify the sinner through Christ. It is constantly stressed by Melanchthon that here we find the difference between philosophy, which teaches that man can be just through his virtues, and the gospel which teaches that man is justified by God through His grace in Christ. . . . Melanchthon is strongly opposed to Thomas’ doctrine that justification takes place through faith which has been formed by these theological virtues, especially love. This means, according to Melanchthon, that man is in fact justified through his own virtues.³⁴

Meijering’s statements are helpful because they explain why Melanchthon grouped the ancient Greek philosophers and Aquinas together when discussing the role of virtue in the life of a person seeking to be just. Melanchthon reasoned that without the Holy Spirit, our best behaviors and

³⁰ Ibid., 41.

³¹ Ibid., 41.

³² Ibid., 47.

³³ Ibid., 46.

³⁴ E.P. Meijering, *Melanchthon and Patristic Thought* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1983), 7, 107. This theme of the soteriological centrality of faith and not love occurs elsewhere in Melanchthon’s writings. Following the Augsburg Confession which was published on June 25, 1530 which Melanchthon signed as the chief author, he wrote to fellow reformer John Brentz, “I am revising the Apology [to the Augsburg Confession]. . . . At the present time the article that men are justified by faith, rather than my love, is being copiously treated. If Christ is our atonement, then it is necessary to understand that we are justified by faith, and that justification by love is justification according to the Law and not according to the Gospel. The Gospel sets forth one kind of righteousness, the Law another.” See Manschreck, *Melanchthon: The Quiet Reformer*, 16.

pursuits are rooted in an unwavering self-centeredness and for this reason, no act can ever merit eternal life.³⁵ Even if the act looks virtuous and noble, the affection and motivation lying “behind” it are corrupt. This thought bears a close resemblance to Helmut Thielicke’s motive-centered account of Protestant Christian ethics which will be treated in detail in chapter four. Melanchthon goes on to write that a person without God’s spirit who is acting virtuously may not even be aware of the true nature of their motivation.³⁶ According to Melanchthon, only by the indwelling Holy Spirit can a person perform an act that is not sinful because it is only by the Holy Spirit that one is enabled to act for reasons other than the self. He writes: “Everything that godless fools³⁷ have written about free will and the righteousness of works comprises nothing but a thoroughly pharisaical tradition.”³⁸ The overemphasis of external evaluation that is inherent in pharisaism is best represented in Jesus’ rebuke of the Pharisees:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may become clean. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.³⁹

In Melanchthon's view, past philosophers, the Pharisees, Aquinas, and the Scholastics all commit the same error: they believe that a person without the Holy Spirit can perform a righteous or virtuous deed. For this reason, he addresses his attack toward all of them since in his view they all fail to consider

³⁵ Manschreck provides a similar summary of Melanchthon’s thought on self-love, the insufficiency of external acts, and the identification of the “inordinate self-concern” with original sin. See Manschreck, *Melanchthon: The Quiet Reformer*, 85.

³⁶ Melanchthon, *Loci Communes* 1521, 40.

³⁷ Melanchthon follows Luther’s example by maligning Aquinas and the Scholastics with terms such as “sophists,” “godless fools,” pseudo-theologians,” and “pharisaical Scholastics.”

³⁸ Melanchthon, *Loci Communes* 1521, 35. In the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Melanchthon makes a similar point, writing: “So if we accept this teaching of the opponents that we merit forgiveness of sins and justification by the works of reason, there will be no difference between philosophical or Pharisaic righteousness and Christian righteousness.” See Melanchthon, *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, 109.

³⁹ Matt. 23:25–28.

the innermost affections.⁴⁰ As he writes: “But what do external works have to do with Christian discipline, if meanwhile the heart is corrupt?”⁴¹

Later in *Loci Communes 1521*, Melanchthon writes: “Our righteousness does not, then, consist in our works, no matter how good they are or seem to be. Rather, faith alone in the mercy and grace of God in Jesus Christ is our righteousness.”⁴² By the term “faith,” Melanchthon means: “not merely a historical knowledge (*historie notitiam*) but rather a trust (*fiducia*) in the mercy promised for the sake of (*propter*) the Son of God.”⁴³ In reference to this view of faith as trust and the non-justificatory role of good works in Melanchthon’s thought, Rogness writes: “Faith is a trust and acceptance of Christ. It is not something which takes shape by doing works, but which expresses itself in works.”⁴⁴ This faith-alone stance is typical of a Protestant view of what is required for salvation and is the doctrine that Melanchthon defends throughout the entirety of his life and ministry. As Luther wrote: “[Works] do not make you a Christian. Actually they come forth from you because you have already been made a Christian.”⁴⁵

A clear view of Melanchthon’s doctrine of justification also appears nine years later in the Augsburg Confession, which he wrote and signed in the company of others.⁴⁶ Manschreck writes that this document is one of the “three foundational pillars of the Reformation along with Luther’s 1520 essays” and Melanchthon’s *Loci*.⁴⁷ In article IV titled, “On Justification,” Melanchthon writes:

And they [Lutheran churches] teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own abilities, merits or works, but are justified freely by Christ through faith, when they believe they have received it by grace, and that their sins are forgiven by Christ who in his death made

⁴⁰ Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1521*, 43.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 115.

⁴³ John V. Fesko, *Beyond Calvin: Union With Christ and Justification in Early Modern Reformed Theology (1517-1700)* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 143.

⁴⁴ Rogness, *Philip Melanchthon*, 106.

⁴⁵ Martin Luther, “A Brief Introduction on What to Look For and Expect in the Gospels,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 35, trans. and ed. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 120.

⁴⁶ Though there were several men who worked with Melanchthon to produce the Augsburg Confession, the document is chiefly viewed as Melanchthon’s work. See Rogness, *Philip Melanchthon*, 103.

⁴⁷ Manschreck, *Melanchthon: The Quiet Reformer*, 88.

satisfaction for our sins. God imputes this faith for righteousness in his sight.⁴⁸

This kind of righteousness—that which is imputed and cannot be “produced by [oneself]”⁴⁹—is what Luther labels, “alien righteousness,” which he describes as “the righteousness of another, instilled from without.”⁵⁰ Staying with this theme, article VI, titled “Of the New Obedience” states: “it is right to do good works commanded by God because of God’s will, not so that we may be confident of deserving justification from God because of those works.”⁵¹ Article XX of the Augsburg Confession, titled “Of Faith and Good Works,” states:

our works cannot reconcile us to God, or merit remission of sins, grace, and justification, but that we receive them in faith when we believe that we are received into grace for Christ’s sake. . . . And whoever believes that he deserves grace because of his own works, spurns the merit and grace of Christ, and seek the way to God without Christ, by human ability, although Christ says of himself, I am the way, the truth, and the light (Jn.14:6).⁵²

In this same article, Melanchthon goes on to say that he has not stepped outside of historical Christianity and offered a “new interpretation of Paul.” Rather, he writes that he and the Lutheran churches have done nothing but present a view of justification that can be traced back to Augustine, Ambrose, and Paul himself.

For further evidence for Melanchthon’s view of justification, the *Apology* and *Loci Communes 1555* are also helpful⁵³. Concerning the former, Manschreck writes: “No document is more important in the theological writing

⁴⁸ Philip Melanchthon, “Augsburg Confession,” in *A Melanchthon Reader*, trans. Ralph Keen (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 1988), 101.

⁴⁹ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1963), 227.

⁵⁰ Martin Luther, “Two Kinds of Righteousness,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 31, trans. Lowell J. Satre, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 297. For a clear explanation of Luther’s “alien” righteousness, see Robert Kolb, “Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness,” in *Harvesting Martin Luther’s Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 48.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 106.

⁵³ The 1555 edition of *Loci Communes* was one of the last. It preceded the last edition which was published in 1559 by only four years. Melanchthon died in 1560.

of the Reformation than the Apology of the Augsburg Confession.”⁵⁴ In this document, Melanchthon affirms in no uncertain terms: “For it is false that by our works we merit forgiveness of sins. It is false, too, that men are accounted righteous before God because of the righteousness of reason.”⁵⁵ He continues:

Now we shall know that faith justifies. In the first place, we would remind our readers that if we must hold to the proposition, “Christ is the mediator,” then we must defend the proposition, “Faith justifies.” For how will Christ be the mediator if we do not use him as mediator in our justification and believe that for his sake we are accounted righteous? But to believe means to trust in Christ’s merits. . . . When we say that faith justifies, some may think this refers to the beginning, as though faith were the start of justification or a preparation for justification. Then it would not be faith, but the works that follow, by which we would become acceptable unto God. . . . Regarding faith we maintain not this, but rather that because of Christ by faith itself we are truly accounted righteous or acceptable before God. And “to be justified” means to make unrighteous men righteous . . . that faith alone makes a righteous man out of an unrighteous one, that is, that it receives the forgiveness of sins.⁵⁶

As Manschreck observes, “Justification by faith keyed the contents, for not only was this itself copiously treated, but every topic was inevitably brought back to this central doctrine.”⁵⁷ You can barely turn a page or read a paragraph without Melanchthon affirming again and again that no work—whether a precept (i.e., command) or counsel—can justify a human being before God. In *Loci Communes 1555*, Melanchthon remains consistent in his defense that justification is only by faith. He writes: “it is obvious that our works cannot merit forgiveness of sins; so also are our works not perfection, for in this weak life we are still far from fulfillment of the law, and much sin, doubt and disorder remain in us . . .”⁵⁸ The mention of “perfection” is important because

⁵⁴ Manschreck, *Melanchthon: The Quiet Reformer*, 213.

⁵⁵ Melanchthon, *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, 110. “By reason” is in reference to deeds that are reasoned virtuous and for that reason, performed. However, reason cannot purify the motive. For Melanchthon, good acts can only be done with the right motive after one has been justified, not before. Following justification, a person has the Holy Spirit who enables them to perform virtuous acts for God and others rather than some selfish motive.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 116–117.

⁵⁷ Manschreck, *Melanchthon: The Quiet Reformer*, 212.

⁵⁸ Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1555*, 131.

Melanchthon is clearly referring to counsels, not precepts, when making the point that no matter how respectable an act is that one might perform, it still falls far short of the perfection that the law requires. As Paul stated, if someone is going to attempt to be justified by keeping the law, they must obey the entire law, which from a Protestant perspective, is meant to convey that it is impossible to be justified by works.⁵⁹ This *impossibility* is what Calvin emphasizes in what he writes is the first of three functions of the moral law in Scripture:

First, while showing God's righteousness, that is, what God requires of us, [the law] admonishes each one of his unrighteousness and convicts him of his sin. All men, without exception, are puffed up with insane confidence in their own powers, unless the Lord proves their vanity. . . . it is fitting that this arrogance be cast down and confounded that, naked and empty-handed, they may flee to God's mercy, repose in it, hide within it, and seize upon it alone for righteousness and merit.⁶⁰

Returning to Melanchthon's discussion of celibacy, it is clear that he does not think that a person can be justified before God via the counsel of celibacy because of his more general point that no act can justify a person before God. He goes as far as to say that it is the married man who is in a better position to obey God than a man who has taken a vow of celibacy. He writes:

For no matter how celibate a man is, he cannot fulfill the law against adultery since it cannot happen that concupiscence does not inflame him, no matter how chaste he is. But concupiscence is forbidden by the commandment. It can happen sometimes that married men are closer to keeping this commandment than virgins.⁶¹

Later in *Loci Communes 1555*, Melanchthon writes in article XIII titled, "Of the Word 'Justification' and 'To Be Justified'": "God forgives us our sins, and accepts us, in that he imputes righteousness to us for the sake of the Son, although we are still weak and sinful. We must, however, accept this imputed righteousness with faith."⁶² As was the case with the 1521 version of *Loci Communes*, the Augsburg Confession, and the *Apology*, neither time nor

⁵⁹ Gal. 5:3.

⁶⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1975), 35.

⁶¹ Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1521*, 73.

⁶² Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1555*, 161.

space allows for a detailed account of Melanchthon's treatment of the doctrine of justification in *Loci Communes 1555*. Yet the above material is adequate to demonstrate Melanchthon's pro-Reformation teaching that no work, whether it is labeled a precept or counsel, can contribute to a person's justification before God. So if Melanchthon did not mean what Aquinas meant by the term "counsel," what did he mean when he used the term and affirmed celibacy as one instance? And more importantly, considering the focus of this thesis, does Melanchthon's concept of a counsel mirror the concept of supererogation? I will argue that it does.

The Attributes that Melanchthon Assigns to Counsels

As stated earlier, Melanchthon defines a counsel in *Loci Communes 1555* as a "doctrine, not a commandment; it does not demand a work, even though it praises the work as blameless and useful." Beginning with this definition, I will compare different aspects of this definition with some of Melanchthon's most significant comments about counsels in *Loci Communes 1521* in an effort to extract any general principle that is either explicitly or implicitly present. The reason for this approach is that though a definition of counsels is provided in 1555, it is ambiguous. Moreover, Melanchthon's treatment of counsels in the *Loci Communes 1521* is unsystematic. By combining both, I hope to develop a more precise definition. The general principles will then be combined in an effort to understand Melanchthon's notion of a "counsel" and to show that it closely resembles the concept of supererogation in moral philosophy. Once this is in place, I will attempt to explain what Melanchthon must have meant when he wrote that celibacy was the only counsel he found in the Gospels.⁶³ Last, I will conclude this opening section by discussing why there are viable reasons for challenging the view that celibacy is supererogatory.

Similar to an act of supererogation, Melanchthon held the view that a counsel is optional. At the beginning of the section titled "Counsels," he writes:

⁶³ Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1521*, 73.

The sophists commit a horrible godless error when they make “counsels” out of Divine Law. They teach that God does not command certain things as a necessity but merely urges us to do them, so that if anyone wants to obey them, he may. . . . Moreover, they generally include among these counsels those commandments that are found in Matthew 5, namely, loving your enemies . . . forgiving, lending to anyone who has need with no hope of return. We say that all these things are required, and we number them among the commandments.”⁶⁴

In this opening passage, it is clear that Melanchthon considers a commandment as obligatory, something that—as he writes later in 1555—“speaks of necessary obedience.”⁶⁵ In Melanchthon’s terms, “Divine laws are those laws that God has decreed through the canonical Scriptures.”⁶⁶ The laws stem directly from the fact that God has issued a command and the act of commanding has generated duties which are universally and irrevocably binding. Therefore, these laws or commands are not optional. Obedience is required. On the other hand, it is clear that Melanchthon conceives of a counsel as optional from the statement: “God does not command certain things as a necessity but merely urges us to do them, so that if anyone wants to obey them, he may . . .” Granted, Melanchthon is rejecting what he labels as a sophistic view, but in doing so, he provides insight into his conception of a counsel. Commanding and urging are two different types of acts. Whereas the former obligates a person, the latter only encourages them to perform a particular act. If I urge someone to do something, most often I am communicating something like, “I really want you to do this, but I do not require it.” An agent can decide to perform or not perform the *urged* act. This is in line with Melanchthon’s 1555 definition of a counsel when he writes: “A counsel is a doctrine, not a commandment; it does not demand a work . . .”⁶⁷ In other words, if a person decides to not perform a counsel, no moral wrong has been committed. This clearly resembles an act of supererogation because a supererogatory act is also optional.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 71.

⁶⁵ Melanchthon, *Loci Communes* 1555, 130.

⁶⁶ Melanchthon, *Loci Communes* 1521, 66.

⁶⁷ Melanchthon, *Loci Communes* 1555, 130.

Melanchthon's view of a counsel as optional is also evident from another angle. He argues that Aquinas and the Scholastics have mistakenly interpreted several commands in Matthew 5 as counsels. Melanchthon writes:

So also [Jesus] threatens blame and judgement on anyone who gets angry with this neighbor or shows contempt for him by saying, 'Racha' (Matthew 5:22). But if he were merely giving us advice not to get angry, why did he threaten judgment? If we are free either to get angry or not to get angry against someone who does us wrong, why does he warn of punishments?⁶⁸

In arguing that the Scholastics have wrongly classified the act of calling another "Racha," he provides another glimpse into his concept of counsel. He clearly states Jesus' threats of judgement and warnings of punishment are out of place if not calling someone "Racha" is merely a counsel. Implicit within this view is that like advice, one can act on a counsel or not. This underscores the property of optionality. Melanchthon's view of a counsel is that its performance is neither obligatory nor forbidden and for this reason, a moral agent is *free* to perform the act or not. Due to a counsel's optionality, the act cannot be classified as a duty or an act of wrongdoing. This leaves only two options for Melanchthon's counsel: it is either a supererogatory act possessing moral worth or it is merely permissible, being morally indifferent.

Turning once again to the 1555 definition, Melanchthon writes: "even though [the doctrine of a counsel] praises the work as blameless and useful." By "blameless," it seems clear that Melanchthon is saying that the *work*, or act, is morally good from a moral perspective. It is not trivial from a moral perspective. This indicates that Melanchthon conceived of a counsel as possessing moral worth. This is clear when you look at what he wrote about celibacy as a counsel. In *Loci Communes 1521*, he quotes the words of Christ concerning celibacy in Matthew 19:12: "Whoever can receive it, let him receive it."⁶⁹ The reverse is implied: *If you cannot receive it, then do not do so*. This was in response to the disciples saying, "If this is the situation between a

⁶⁸ Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1521*, 71.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

husband and wife, it is better not to marry.”⁷⁰ Melanchthon casts Jesus as recommending celibacy if one is able to accept such a lifestyle. He then goes on to write: “I do not deny that celibacy has been recommended. But since the weakness of our flesh is such that even Christ denies that all can accept his speech about celibacy, what good does it do to make so precarious and dangerous a lifestyle common to so many thousands of men?”⁷¹ It is also interesting that Aquinas seems to suggest something similar to Melanchthon’s point about the weakness of the flesh in relation to the counsels. He writes: “The above-mentioned counsels, considered in themselves, are of advantage to everyone; but owing to the lack of the proper disposition in certain cases, it happens that they are of no advantage to someone, since he is not drawn to them.”⁷² The phrase “lack of the proper disposition” bears some resemblance to Melanchthon’s “weakness of the flesh.” Both seem to be communicating that the inability to live a celibate life is due to an internal deficiency of some sort. This could be the result of a lack of calling. If God has not called a person to celibacy, then they will not have received the grace from God that empowers them to live in such a manner. This is the vocation-based perspective of celibacy, of which more will be said towards the end of this section. Returning to Melanchthon, his view can probably be summarized as follows: *If someone believes that they can live celibately, then they should because it is recommended, but if someone does not believe that they can forego marriage and abstain from sexual relations, then they are free to marry.* This mirrors Paul’s teaching in the first part of 1 Corinthians 7. The point is that Melanchthon views the counsel of celibacy as being morally valuable as well as being optional (i.e., neither obligatory nor forbidden). Thus, it appears that his view of what constitutes a counsel matches the standard criteria for an act to be classified as supererogatory in moral philosophy.

As an aside, it is interesting that Melanchthon attributes this solely to the weakness of the flesh, considering that he himself was married.

⁷⁰ Matt. 19:10.

⁷¹ Melanchthon, *Loci Communes* 1521, 74.

⁷² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 108, a. 5, resp., 65.

Melanchthon appears to have intended on living celibately in order to fully devote himself to the tasks that God had set before him. It was his custom to rise at 2 a.m. and not retire until the evening.⁷³ Luther was afraid that Melanchthon, as a result of his relentless work ethic, small stipend, and the northern climate in Wittenberg, would either die due to bad physical health brought on by these conditions or that he would take another post elsewhere.⁷⁴ Robert Stupperich observes: “The labors that burdened Melanchthon had greatly undermined his health. His friends were anxious for the Master, who knew only work without regard for his outward welfare and circumstances.”⁷⁵ At one point, Luther pleaded with Melanchthon to get married so that “he might have someone to take care of his weak body.”⁷⁶ In response, Melanchthon “first rebelled at the suggestion of marriage; not because he hated women, or esteemed marriage lightly, but because he loved study more.”⁷⁷ However, Melanchthon finally consented to Luther’s incessant nagging (albeit friendly) and married Katharine Krapp on November 25, 1520. What is interesting is that it seems that Melanchthon possessed both the desire and will to accept a celibate life but then still chose to marry. This raises an interesting question: *Had God given Melanchthon the grace to live celibately but he chose to marry anyway?* This question cannot be addressed here, but it is instructive because it suggests that God might have equipped Melanchthon for celibacy which, in Melanchthon’s words, is recommended, although he eventually decided to forego this lifestyle in favor of marriage. Would Melanchthon admit that he had taken the less recommended path or would he have defended marriage as being a worthy calling similar to that of celibacy? The following excerpt from *Loci Communes 1555* suggests the latter: “All these are commanded works: in marriage, to avoid all forbidden sexual relationships; and outside marriage,

⁷³ James W. Richard, *Heroes of the Reformation: Philip Melanchthon* (London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1898), 62.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁷⁵ Robert Stupperich, *Melanchthon*, trans. Robert H. Fischer (London: Lutterworth Press, 1966), 61.

⁷⁶ James W. Richard, *Heroes of the Reformation*, 62. This point is also made by Stupperich. See Stupperich, *Melanchthon*, 61.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 62–63. Stupperich also confirms this point concerning study that Richard makes. See Stupperich, *Melanchthon*, 61.

to live purely without any misuse of sex. If one has not the gift to live purely or chastely outside marriage, then he is commanded to get married.”⁷⁸ In this passage, Melanchthon seems to take a more spiritual approach to celibacy, interpreting it as a call to sexual purity rather than the concrete reality of chosen singleness. However, this does not negate the fact that when Melanchthon writes that celibacy is a counsel in *Loci Communes 1521*, he has in mind the actual state of being unmarried so that one is unhindered in their devotion to the Lord. As will be discussed in this chapter, Melanchthon’s use of the word “gift” in relation to celibacy implies a vocation-oriented view of celibacy, and by implication of marriage as well.

Whatever we make of the apparent discrepancy between Melanchthon’s comments about celibacy as a recommended counsel in *Loci Communes 1521* and his choice to get married, it is not at all evident that Melanchthon’s achieved less for Christ than he would have if he would have remained single. Instead, the opposite seems true. Richard writes that Melanchthon and his family extended a “liberal hospitality” to “exiles, wandering scholars, comers and goers of every age, sex, and condition. . . .”⁷⁹ Regarding this “steady stream of visitors,” George Wilson writes “not a few of them came for help.”⁸⁰ Due to a combination of Katharine’s boundless charity and Philip’s limitless generosity,⁸¹ their home was not only a hub for lively theological debate and discussion, but also a place where people came and were ministered to in the name of Christ. Although he originally did not intend to get married so that he could devote more time to study, one does not get the impression that Melanchthon’s influence and service in God’s kingdom suffered as a result. In fact, the opposite could be claimed. The choice that he made and the influence of his marriage on others suggests that marriage was just as holy a path for Melanchthon as celibacy would have been, though in a completely different way.

⁷⁸ Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1555*, 138.

⁷⁹ Richard, *Heroes of the Reformation*, 66.

⁸⁰ George Wilson, *Philip Melanchthon: 1497–1560* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1897), 131.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 130–131.

Whichever view we take of these events, it remains clear that Melanchthon does not think that every Christian will be able to live a celibate life, and he attributes this in *Loci Communes 1521* to the weakness of the flesh. Yet, the weakness could be explained differently if framed by the Protestant doctrine of vocation. Regarding the inability of most people to choose celibacy, it could simply be that most people have not received the appropriate calling. As stated earlier, Melanchthon seems to suggest this in *Loci Communes 1555* by using the word “gift” in relation to celibacy.⁸² The basic idea is that celibacy is a vocation—or *calling*—that God issues to certain individuals. If God has not called a person to celibacy, then that individual will not possess or experience the necessary grace to obey the call. This vocation-related interpretation seems to go hand-in-hand with another remark that Jesus made that Melanchthon does not mention. After Jesus teaches on divorce in Matthew 19:1–9, the disciples remark: “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”⁸³ Jesus then responds: “Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given.”⁸⁴ Only after this exchange does Jesus say: “Whoever can receive it, let him receive it.”⁸⁵ The phrase “to whom it is given” suggests that if God has not “given” celibacy to a person in the form of a grace-empowered calling, then not only will the individual not feel “drawn”⁸⁶ to it, but more importantly, the person will not have the internal resources necessary to live in such a manner. Arguing that 1 Corinthians 7 does not offer support for the traditional understanding of commands-counsels, John Glaser writes the following about celibacy:

⁸² Cf. 1 Cor. 7:7.

⁸³ Matt. 19:10.

⁸⁴ Matt. 19:11.

⁸⁵ While this statement is found in Matt. 19:12, I have chosen to use Melanchthon’s wording as opposed to the NRSV since I am discussing Melanchthon’s view of counsels in this section. Besides, there is not much difference between the two. Jesus’ statement in the NRSV reads, “Let anyone accept this who can.” For all practical purposes, the statements are semantically identical.

⁸⁶ I wonder if by “drawn” Aquinas is communicating something along the lines of “desire.” It seems characteristic of God’s goodness that the calling he issues to an individual would result in the individual actually desiring that to which God is calling them. This would be part of the empowering grace due to the fact that desire is a strong, psychological force that propels one to walk in the direction it recommends.

In chapter 7 we find only that virginity is recommended as better in general. If one finds that he lacks the necessary charisma for this, he should marry . . . if he finds that he cannot live in the state of virginity this indicates that he has another charisma: *ho men houtōs* ["one having one kind"], *ho de houtōs* (7b) ["and another a different kind"]. The very question that has to be answered to establish the doctrine of commands-counsels is never asked or discussed by Paul here: whether *for the individual* to whom such a call is directed, this 'better state' of virginity is only recommended or commanded.⁸⁷

Several pages later, Glaser writes: "this inability to live as virgin or widow is a sign that such a state in life is not the specific one *to which* this individual is called; it is not his specific charisma-grace."⁸⁸ As Karl Rahner points out in a different context, this would require the Church to affirm that there is not only a positive call to celibacy, but also a positive call to marriage. Rahner writes:

It follows that for those called to it, marriage is not just something *permitted*, but is really a vocation, and that God means it to be a positive element in the holiness set before them. Hence it can, and in the last resort must, be said that for the great majority of Christians, marriage (and with it in general state of life 'in the world') is the *best* positive means God gives them for reaching the perfection he expects of them. . . . For the majority of men, marriage is a positive call from the God of creation and redemption, and not merely a fragment of the old order tragically upset by sin and tolerated in the redeemed because of their weakness and hardness of heart.⁸⁹

If this were the case, any notion of celibacy being supererogatory would be challenged. After all, if there exist positive calls to both marriage and celibacy, then it can be argued that the calling is also a *command*. Within this vocation-related paradigm, *to be called* is in some respects the same as *being commanded*. If one is called to marriage, then celibacy would actually be an act of disobedience for that person. Likewise, if a person is called to celibacy, then marriage would be an act of disobedience for that individual. Von Balthasar makes a similar point, which is interesting considering that he is writing from a Roman Catholic perspective: "The decision to embrace the

⁸⁷ John W. Glaser, "Commands-Counsels: A Pauline Teaching?", *Theological Studies* 31, no. 2 (1970): 277.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁸⁹ Karl Rahner, "The Theology of the Religious Life," in *Religious Orders in the Modern World*, trans. Walter Mitchell (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1966), 50–52.

evangelical counsels depends on a personal experience of being called (if this is lacking, it would be imperfect, even sacrilegious, to enter this state, and it would be decidedly more perfect to choose to remain in the world).”⁹⁰ This would mean that a celibate life in service to God is not supererogatory; that is, it is nothing more than an obedient response of an individual called by God to such a life. In the words of Craig Blomberg: “Neither celibacy nor marriage is superior to the other in God’s eyes.”⁹¹

This discussion is important because it opens the door to a vocation-based interpretation of celibacy that directly challenges the idea that celibacy represents a counsel or act of supererogation. The mere possibility of being able to question the supererogatory status of celibacy suggests that it is wise to search elsewhere in Protestant Christianity for acts of supererogation. In the next two sections, I argue that there is at least one clear act of supererogation in the New Testament that has hitherto gone unnoticed. It is my hope that by identifying one such act, the door will be opened to consider other acts and types of act as well. Before moving ahead with the argument in section two, I want to conclude this section by bringing together the various attributes that Melanchthon assigns to a counsel, to define a coherent concept from his otherwise unsystematic treatment of the idea. This will allow for a more direct comparison between his view of a counsel and the concept of supererogation with the intent of showing that in essence, Melanchthon—a Protestant—endorsed something very similar to supererogation.

Melanchthon’s view of a counsel is that its performance is neither obligatory nor forbidden and for this reason, a moral agent is free to decide whether to perform it. Therefore, only two categories remain: a merely permissible act and a supererogatory act. In moral philosophy, the only property that separates a *permissible* act from a *supererogatory* act is moral worth. The question that now presents itself is: “Is a counsel in Melanchthon’s

⁹⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “A Theology of the Evangelical Counsels,” *CrossCurrents* 16, no. 2 (1966): 225.

⁹¹ Craig Blomberg, “Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy: An Exegesis of Matthew 19:3–12,” *Trinity Journal* 11 (1990): 194.

view indifferent or does it possess worth from a moral point of view?” Melanchthon clearly holds the view that a counsel—in his case, celibacy in particular—is an act that possesses moral worth. As mentioned earlier, he writes: “I do not deny that celibacy has been recommended.”⁹² The “recommended” is clearly a reference to Jesus’ words: “Whoever can receive it, let him receive it.” This recommendation-oriented language can also be found in Paul’s writings concerning celibacy. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul writes:

I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord.⁹³

Paul continues: “So then, he who marries his fiancée (*parthenos*) does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.”⁹⁴ While Paul writes that marriage is not a sin,⁹⁵ he draws a key distinction between that which is *good* and that which is *better* to suggest that from a practical standpoint, celibacy is the superior option because it allows a person to serve the Lord without distraction. With some of these passages presumably in mind, Melanchthon writes: “When Paul is discussing virginity in 1 Corinthians 7, he does not dare to prescribe anything because he does not want to throw a noose around anyone. Instead, he wants people to choose the kind of life in which they can constantly serve God without any distraction . . .”⁹⁶ Combining Melanchthon’s scattered comments into a more systematic account, the counsel of celibacy is an act which is highly recommended by the Lord as a practical means to

⁹² Melanchthon, *Loci Communes* 1521, 74.

⁹³ 1 Cor. 7:32–35.

⁹⁴ 1 Cor. 7:38.

⁹⁵ 1 Cor. 7:28, 36.

⁹⁶ Melanchthon, *Loci Communes* 1521, 88; One minor point is that Melanchthon seems to suggest that both celibate and married individuals are capable of “serving God without any distraction.” On the other hand, Paul seems to suggest that only those who refrain from marriage and choose celibacy can live a life that is characterized by “unhindered devotion to the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:35).

“serve God without any distraction.” For this reason, it clearly possesses great moral worth in Melanchthon’s thought because it frees a person to serve God wholeheartedly.⁹⁷

There is strong support for the claim that Melanchthon’s affirmation of one counsel can be interpreted in contemporary language as an affirmation of the possibility of supererogation within Protestant ethics. The reason for this is straightforward. As just demonstrated, Melanchthon affirms the possibility of an act that is neither obligatory nor forbidden and that possesses moral worth. Putting aside the issue of intentions and motives for now, Melanchthon’s counsel satisfies the standard three criteria for supererogation as set forth by J.O. Urmson and other moral philosophers. Not only is it relevant to understanding what Melanchthon really meant when he appeared to agree with Aquinas in affirming celibacy as a counsel, it is also valuable because it provides an instance in the history of Protestantism of an individual doing exactly what Gregory Mellema suggested is possible—*namely, affirming that an act of supererogation is possible while rejecting the idea that the act is capable of “justifying a person in God’s eyes.”*⁹⁸ As I have reiterated, this double-move is theologically necessary for defending the notion that acts of supererogation are possible in Protestant Christian ethics.

Remaining and Reconciling with an Adulterous Spouse

The main reason Melanchthon’s claim that celibacy is a counsel is important to this thesis is that his concept of a counsel closely resembles the concept of supererogation in moral philosophy. As a Protestant thinker, he embraced supererogation. This makes my pro-supererogation argument in this section seem more feasible since I also am engaging supererogation from a Protestant perspective. Granted, his view can be challenged by a vocation-

⁹⁷ Craig Blomberg makes a similar point. He writes: “We need more John Stotts or Amy Carmichaels who consciously commit themselves to a life of singleness for the sake of devoting more energy and resources to kingdom priorities. See Blomberg, “Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy,” 195.

⁹⁸ Mellema, *Beyond the Call*, 52.

based view of marriage and celibacy, but this does not change the fact that he saw a place for something like supererogation within a Protestant framework. I will argue that there is at least one clear act of supererogation that has hitherto gone unnoticed by those who oppose the possibility of supererogation in Protestant Christian ethics. The act is as follows: *choosing to remain married to an adulterous spouse in an effort to reconcile and prevent divorce*. For the sake of the argument, it is assumed that the adulterous spouse is repentant of their sin.⁹⁹ It is also worth mentioning that for the purpose of this chapter, I will initially discuss a sanitized version of adultery where one spouse is labeled “innocent” and the unfaithful spouse is labeled “guilty.” However, I readily admit that in real life, things are much messier; seldom is there an “innocent” spouse. There are multiple reasons—some “better” than others—that someone chooses to cross the line and cheat on their spouse. The “innocent” spouse might have been physically absent, uninterested in sex, a workaholic, verbally abusive, selfish, unconcerned with their spouse’s physical and emotional needs, uninterested in emotional intimacy, or too obsessed with hobbies. Stanley Grenz writes that it is most likely that “both partners share in the responsibility for the destruction of the marriage” no matter which committed the concrete act.¹⁰⁰ The point is that although only one spouse commits the act of adultery, the “fault is usually not just one-sided.”¹⁰¹ This does not remove the guilt of the unfaithful partner, but it would be superficial and a gross oversight to believe that in cases of adultery, there is one spouse who is wholly innocent. However, I maintain the distinction between “innocent” and “guilty” throughout the chapter for conceptual clarity.

⁹⁹ The reason for this assumption is simple. If the guilty spouse is not repentant, then there is no reason to think that they will return to the innocent spouse and seek reconciliation, and if they do not return, the innocent spouse is not presented with an opportunity to supererogate in the first place.

¹⁰⁰ Stanley Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 126.

¹⁰¹ David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce & Remarriage in the Church: Biblical Solutions for Pastoral Realities* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 89.

There are four instances in the Synoptic Gospels where Jesus' teaching on divorce is recorded.¹⁰² Two of these occur in Matthew, one in Mark, and the other in Luke. In Matthew 5:31-32, Jesus is recorded as having said the following: "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." Several chapters later, Matthew writes: "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery."¹⁰³ In the Matthean account, the phrases "except on the ground of unchastity" and "except for unchastity" constitute what is commonly referred to as the "exception clause." Essentially, Matthew presents a version of Jesus' teaching that allows a person to divorce a spouse who has committed adultery and thereby proven unfaithful to the marriage covenant. In contrast, the Markan and Lukan accounts do not include the exception clause. Mark writes: "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."¹⁰⁴ In a similar vein, Luke writes: "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and whoever marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery."¹⁰⁵ Needless to say, this prompted a centuries-old debate among Biblical scholars and theologians over whether the exception clause should be attributed to Jesus or whether it is a "Matthean redaction [and therefore] not authentic historical Jesus tradition."¹⁰⁶ The significance of this is obvious: *If the clause can be attributed to Jesus, then the absence of the clause in both Mark and Luke will be explained differently (and with drastically different implications)*

¹⁰² Richard Hayes makes a similar observation when he writes that there are "five significant passages in the New Testament that deal directly with divorce." 1 Cor. 7:10-16 is the only passage of the five that does not appear in one of the three Synoptic Gospels. See Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (London: T&T Clark, 1996), 349.

¹⁰³ Matt. 19:9.

¹⁰⁴ Mark 10:11-12.

¹⁰⁵ Luke 16:18.

¹⁰⁶ David L. Turner, *Matthew: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 172.

than if the clause was added by Matthew but never taught by Jesus. A more detailed discussion of this issue will follow.

As the above issue suggests, there are a number of exegetical and hermeneutical issues related to the words of Jesus in the Synoptics concerning divorce. David Janzen writes: "It is likely that not a truer word has been written in the field of biblical studies than Ben Witherington's observation that nearly everything about the two Matthean divorce exception clauses is disputed."¹⁰⁷ Considering this, I will now enumerate three theological commitments that I am making in order to present my argument.

Three Theological Commitments

The first theological commitment involves the interpretation of the word *πορνεία* (*porneía*) which occurs in both Matthean exception clauses. In English translations of the Bible, the word is translated differently from one translation to the next. Here are a few examples: fornication,¹⁰⁸ unchastity,¹⁰⁹ immorality,¹¹⁰ sexual immorality.¹¹¹ As with every other aspect of these passages concerning divorce, there is disagreement on whether *porneía* means adultery, some other sexually immoral act, or both. For example, Abel Isaksson believes there is strong Scriptural support for not interpreting *porneía* to mean adultery. Referring to Matthew 15:19, Mark 7:22, 1 Corinthians 6:9, and Hebrews 13:4, he argues that *porneía* and *μοιχεία* (*moicheía*) are used to describe two different sins.¹¹² *Moicheía* is the specific word for adultery in Koine Greek, having a much narrower meaning than *porneía*. Because this distinction is maintained on several occasions in the New Testament, Isaksson

¹⁰⁷ David Janzen, "The Meaning of Porneia in Matthew 5.32 and 19.9: An Approach From the Study of Ancient Near Eastern Culture," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 80 (2000): 66.

¹⁰⁸ New King James Version.

¹⁰⁹ NRSV.

¹¹⁰ NASB.

¹¹¹ New International Version, Holman Standard Christian Bible, English Standard Version (ESV).

¹¹² Abel Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple*, trans. Neil Tomkinson and Jean Gray (Copenhagen: C.W.K. Gleerup Lund, 1965), 134.

believes that it is a mistake to conclude that in the Matthean exception clauses *porneía* means adultery. In addition, both Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 use both Greek terms, which would appear to support Isaksson's thesis. In Matthew 5:32, *porneía* is used once and *moicheía* twice, and in Matthew 19:9, *porneía* is used once and *moicheía* once. If there is no distinction between the terms, then why was *porneía* used at all when *moicheía* would have been the more parsimonious choice? For this reason among others, Isaksson argues that *porneía* in Matthew 5 and 19 must mean something other than the specific act of adultery. He concludes by arguing that *porneía* should be interpreted to mean a "sexual offense committed by the wife before her marriage."¹¹³ This suggests that if a young woman had had sexual intercourse with another man prior to marriage but hid this knowledge from her husband and proceeded with the marriage, then the husband could divorce his wife once this knowledge came to light.

Having presented an abbreviated view of Isaksson's interpretation of *porneía* in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, it is important to stress that his view represents a departure from the norm. Although there are a variety of opinions regarding the exact meaning of this word, many Biblical scholars agree that while *moicheía* is the specific word for adultery in Koine Greek, *porneía* includes this act along with a broader range of sexually immoral acts as well.¹¹⁴ The main issue is not whether an adulterous act is an instance of *porneía*, but rather, what other acts fall within the term's scope. As an example of this last point, R.T. France, who interprets *porneía* to mean "sexual unfaithfulness," writes: "Here as applied to a married woman it most likely applies to adultery or to the discovery of premarital intercourse with someone other than the husband, or more likely to either or both."¹¹⁵ Leon Morris adds: "the word is

¹¹³ Ibid., 135.

¹¹⁴ Robert H. Smith, *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989), 100; John Murray, *Divorce* (Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1972), 20-21; Janzen, "The Meaning of Porneia," 68; Blomberg, "Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy," 178.

¹¹⁵ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 208-209.

used for all sorts of sexual sins. It is much more likely that in this passage [Matthew 5:31-32] it signifies adultery than something that happened before the marriage.”¹¹⁶ Further support for this theological commitment is provided by David Janzen. He suggests that the main reason that Matthew uses *porneía* rather than *moicheía* is because unlike *moicheía*, *porneía* can also include the act of having sex with someone other than the person you are betrothed to.¹¹⁷ In addition, Blomberg offers a more straightforward objection to Isaksson’s thesis, writing: “What is more, the Pharisees asked Jesus to respond to a debate concerning adultery and not premarital sex.”¹¹⁸ In summary, my first theological commitment—that *porneía* refers to an adulterous act committed by a married spouse—is consistent with the views of several Biblical scholars.

My second theological commitment is that the marriage bond is not automatically severed when adultery occurs. The issue is best expressed by the following series of questions posed by Lewis Smedes:

The first question our Lord’s words pose is this: does the act of adultery itself break a marriage, or does it only provide moral grounds for the innocent partner to break it? Does the innocent partner seeking a divorce ask only for legal recognition of the fact that his/her marriage has been *destroyed*? Or is adultery a *wound* in the tissue of a deeply personal sexual partnership so serious that it gives a partner the moral right to dissolve the marriage through divorce?¹¹⁹

Blomberg observes that marriage is two-fold: “a commitment of one’s fundamental allegiance and an interpersonal relationship culminating in sexual intimacy.” According to Blomberg, the former is exegetically grounded in the creation ordinance to “leave father and mother” and “cleave to one’s spouse,”¹²⁰ whereas the latter element in marriage is grounded in the injunction “be one flesh” which “focuses on the sexual union of marriage . . .”¹²¹ This two-fold view of marriage is important for Blomberg because he reasons

¹¹⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 121-122.

¹¹⁷ Janzen, “The Meaning of Porneia,” 72.

¹¹⁸ Blomberg, *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy*, 176.

¹¹⁹ Smedes, *Sex for Christians*, 193.

¹²⁰ Blomberg, “Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy,” 166. Blomberg uses the King James Version in this context.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

that because two elements are involved in the making of a marriage, vows apart from sexual relations and sexual relations apart from vows are not enough to make a marriage. Both are required.¹²² He continues: “both a commitment and a sexual consummation create a marriage. Infidelity does not by itself dissolve a marriage; it does so only if it is accompanied by a refusal to continue to honor the commitment to ‘leave and cleave.’”¹²³ In other words, if two elements are necessary to make a marriage, both elements must be renounced to end it. For these reasons, the act of adultery does not dissolve the marriage covenant by necessity according to Blomberg’s interpretation. In his view, the choice remains for the innocent spouse to forego divorce in an effort to reconcile with the adulterous spouse. This would require that the guilty spouse is both repentant and desires reconciliation.

On the other hand, if the act of adultery necessarily results in the spiritual dissolution of the marriage bond, the innocent spouse would have no choice but to seek a divorce in order to acknowledge in both legal and social terms what had already occurred spiritually. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson explain this position well: “Divorce is not God’s design for marriage. Even when it is permitted, in the case of infidelity, this is only because the sexual exclusivity of the covenant has already been breached. A formal divorce declares *de jure* nothing more than what *de facto* is already the case.”¹²⁴ In addition, several scholars have noted that Jewish law *required* divorce in cases of adultery.¹²⁵ This requirement is on full display when the Pharisees asked Jesus: “Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?”¹²⁶ The use of “command” is strong language and conveys the message that in certain circumstances—adultery definitely being one

¹²² Lewis Smedes also appears to hold a two-fold view of what is required to make a marriage. See Smedes, *Sex for Christians*, 180.

¹²³ Blomberg, “Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy,” 168.

¹²⁴ G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, ed. *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 24; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 210-211; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, ed. Matthew Black (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 125; Talbot Chambers, “Divorce in the New Testament,” *Reformed Quarterly Review* 1 (Jan 1895): 40.

¹²⁵ Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 467; Beale and Carson, ed. *Commentary*, 24; Smith, *Augsburg Commentary*, 99–100.

¹²⁶ Matt. 19:7.

example—one is required to divorce one’s spouse. However, Jesus responds by saying that Moses only “allowed” divorce and this was only as a concession to rebellious hearts that refused to abide by God’s original intent that marriage be lifelong. The only exception is if adultery has been committed, but even then, the innocent spouse is not obligated to divorce the guilty spouse. Therefore, one can choose to remain and reconcile if they choose. As Beale and Carson write: “Even though he [Jesus] will *allow* an exception (19:9) that seemingly parallels the perspective of Shammai,¹²⁷ he will never *require* divorce, even in the case of marital unfaithfulness.”¹²⁸ Providing further support for this point, David Turner writes: “Moses did not command divorce, and certainly neither did Jesus. Even in the case of marital infidelity, divorce should not be the first option.”¹²⁹ Beale and Carson as well as Turner would not be able to make the above points if they believed that adultery automatically dissolves the marriage bond. Therefore, the option to forego divorce remains. More will be said concerning the significance of Jesus’ choice of words and the subsequent implications, but for now, let it suffice to say that there is biblical support for this second theological commitment.

My third theological commitment is that the supposed contradiction between the Matthean account of Jesus’ teaching on divorce, which includes the exception clause, and the Markan and Lukan accounts, which do not, is only apparent. Although it does not fall within the scope of this chapter or my thesis at large to address this topic at length, it is important to demonstrate that there is Biblical precedent for this third theological commitment. In what is known as the *Markan Priority*, many scholars accept the hypothesis that the Gospel of Mark was written first and both Matthew and Luke used it as a source when writing their own. Concerning the four passages of Scripture in the

¹²⁷ Shammai was a first century, conservative Jewish Rabbi who took a conservative approach to interpreting what Moses said about divorce in Deut. 24:1. This is sufficient detail for now, but a more detailed explanation is forthcoming later in the chapter.

¹²⁸ Beale and Carson, ed. *Commentary on the New Testament*, 59; Much of the debate during this time revolved around a rabbinic dispute between Shammai and his followers and Hillel and his followers. Shammai interpreted a certain phrase in Deut. 24:1 as meaning that someone could only divorce in the case of adultery whereas Hillel interpreted the same phrase quite liberally to mean “for any cause.”

¹²⁹ Turner, *Matthew: Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 463.

Synoptics that deal with the topic of divorce, the hermeneutical consequence of prioritizing Mark's account is that, as stated earlier, the exception clause in Matthew is treated by some as a literary modification rather than as the words of Christ.¹³⁰ Consequently, someone might object that the exception clause would then lose its normative authority because its origin would be human (i.e., Matthew) rather than divine (i.e., actually spoken by God in the person of Jesus). Ultimately, this would result in the dismissal of the clause which would leave us with the Markan and Lukan accounts that do not allow for divorce in any situation including cases of adultery.

There are socio-cultural reasons for rejecting the view that the exception clause originated with Matthew rather than with Jesus himself. The basic line of argument is that Mark and Luke did not include the exception clause because this would have been unnecessary. David Hill, Leon Morris, and Craig Keener all note that because Jewish law required a man to divorce a wife who had committed adultery, it is safe to assume that whereas Matthew chooses to explicitly include the exception clause, Mark and Luke might have *assumed* the exception and believed that the Jews of the day would have mentally added the phrase without prompting.¹³¹ Basically, Mark's and Luke's reasoning could have been that because spiritual and legal permission to divorce an adulterous spouse was common knowledge, they need not state the obvious. On the other hand, because Matthew was concerned with framing the debate in a more rabbinic, pedagogical context, he left no stone unturned and chose to include it.¹³² After all, Matthew does the same thing with the phrase "for any cause."¹³³ This might not seem all that significant except for the fact that the Jews of Matthew's day would have immediately recognized

¹³⁰ See Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Act* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 90. Robert Stein also takes this view. He writes that Matthew's exception clause could be Matthew's attempt to help his readers adapt to Mark's teaching to their situation since Mark's original teaching is so challenging. See Robert Stein, *Mark: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 457.

¹³¹ Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 281; Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 121; Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 467.

¹³² Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, 173.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 134.

that the “for any cause” phrase was at the heart of the rabbinic debate between the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel regarding how to interpret Deuteronomy 24:1–4,¹³⁴ which is the most direct teaching about divorce in the Old Testament. More will be said later in the chapter about these two schools of thought, but let it suffice to say for now that the school of Shammai took a very conservative approach to when divorce was permissible (i.e., when adultery had been committed) whereas the school of Hillel took a very liberal approach (i.e., for any reason). By including “for any cause,” Matthew situates this discourse between Jesus and the religious leaders in the common debate of the day. This view allows for the possibility that the divorce clause is to be attributed to Jesus while also providing a sound explanation as to why two of the three Synoptic writers omitted it. In support of this view, David Instone-Brewer writes:

Although I will agree that Matthew has probably added these phrases to the tradition that he received, I will also argue that he has correctly reinserted something that was present in the original debate. These phrases (or their equivalent) were removed when the debate was summarized for oral or written transmission. They were so obvious and well known to the original audience that they were considered superfluous. They would have been mentally inserted whether they were included or not. . . . I suggest that its inclusion is so obvious in this context that any intelligent Jew would have mentally supplied it if it were missing.¹³⁵

What is thought-provoking about Instone-Brewer’s position is that he represents a middle-ground between the following two extremes: (1) Jesus spoke what is known as the exception clause, and (2) Jesus did not speak what is known as the exception clause and therefore the words do not possess the same authority as the rest of the text. Instone-Brewer’s position is a compromise between the two, allowing one to say, “Jesus did not speak the exception clause” while still maintaining the view that “the exception clause is nonetheless, authoritative,” because everyone would have known that it was implied based on the rabbinic language being used to frame the discussion.

¹³⁴ Gundry, *Matthew*, 377.

¹³⁵ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, 134.

John Davis offers another perspective on why Mark and Luke did not include the exception clause. He writes: “It is likely that Jesus, like most preachers and teachers, repeated the same material in slightly different forms on various occasions. The differences would reflect not a fundamental change in content, but an adaptation of the message to different contexts and audiences.”¹³⁶ Instone-Brewer also mentions this as a possibility, writing: “Mark’s version is more suitable for use in a sermon,” while “Matthew’s version reflects a real rabbinic debate.”¹³⁷ Donald Juel’s writes that the point of the marriage and divorce discussion in Mark is to clarify the intent of the law, and that “acknowledging that God does not will divorce does not settle specific cases.”¹³⁸ The broader point is that context matters, and like any good speaker, Jesus was aware of both his audience and purpose in each specific context and tailored his message accordingly. Thus, the absence of the exception clause in the Markan and Lukan accounts should not be interpreted as providing apodictic proof that the exceptional clause in Matthew is invalid.

One last objection to the view that the Markan and Lukan accounts are at odds with Matthew’s account is based on the belief in the inerrancy of the Bible. Typical of anyone writing from an Evangelical Protestant perspective, John and Paul Feinberg state: “our basic problem with the idea that Jesus never uttered the exception is that it undermines the inerrancy of Scripture.”¹³⁹ The reason for this is quite simple: if Jesus did not utter the exception clause, then there is a mistake in the Bible because Matthew presents the exception clause as being spoken by Jesus. According to John and Paul Feinberg, this would represent a lie on the part of Matthew and would be a mistaken attribution. Thus, the Bible would have an error, which would ultimately reflect negatively on God’s providential oversight of its writing. Presupposing the doctrine of inerrancy, the authors reject the possibility that Jesus’ words about

¹³⁶ John J. Davis, *Evangelical Ethics: Issues Facing the Church Today*, 2nd. ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1993), 86.

¹³⁷ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, 173.

¹³⁸ Donald H. Juel, *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament: Mark* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 140; cf. Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 275.

¹³⁹ Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 613.

divorce in Matthew are not really his words. Whichever position one takes concerning this last argument, the more general point is that the omission of the exception clause in the Gospels of Mark and Luke is not conclusive evidence that Jesus did not utter the exceptional clause. As stated earlier, my goal is not to defend a theological position but merely to demonstrate that there are adequate Biblical grounds for making this third theological commitment.

Having articulated the three theological commitments which underpin my argument for an instance of supererogation in the New Testament, I will now proceed to the argument itself.

The Argument

I propose that the act of choosing to remain married to an adulterous spouse in an effort to reconcile and prevent divorce is supererogatory. For the sake of the argument, it is assumed that the adulterous spouse is repentant. My argument rests upon the following criteria: (1) Jesus does not command the innocent spouse to perform the act in question; (2) Jesus does not forbid the innocent spouse from performing the act in question; and (3) the act possesses moral worth and consequently cannot be classified as merely permissible. As stated earlier, the fourth, motive-related criterion will not be discussed in relation to this particular act until the latter half of chapter four, following a more systematic theoretical treatment of supererogation from a Protestant perspective. Because each of the three criteria named above must be satisfied in order for the act in question to be classified as supererogatory, I will take each in turn.

Remaining and Reconciling is Not Obligatory for the Innocent Spouse

In this section, I argue that the implied act of choosing to remain married to an adulterous spouse in an effort to reconcile and prevent divorce is *not obligatory*. In doing so, I argue against David Instone-Brewer's position that the exception clause only applies when the guilty spouse is unrepentant. If he is right, then the opportunity to supererogate disappears because: (a) if the

adulterous spouse is unrepentant, the option to remain and reconcile does not present, and (b) if the adulterous spouse is repentant, the innocent spouse would be morally obligated to remain and reconcile. Assuming that the adulterous spouse is repentant for the sake of argument, I will argue that the command to forgive does not obligate a person to take the additional step to remain and reconcile. One can do the former without the latter and not be morally blameworthy.

Matthew 19:9 reads: “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.” Modifying the syntax could prove helpful. Staying true to the meaning, the statement could read as follows: “whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery (except in the case of unchastity).” A straightforward reading of the text suggests that Jesus allows an innocent spouse to divorce an adulterous spouse in the case of adultery. Stated differently, no moral obligation exists requiring the innocent spouse to remain married in an effort to reconcile with the adulterous spouse. They can leave if they desire. This appears to clearly satisfy the first criterion of supererogation, namely, that the act in question is not obligatory since Jesus by no means requires it. *Prima facie*, the logic is simple and the conclusion firm. However, David Instone-Brewer objects, writing:

Jesus appeared to imply that the divorce law should only be used if the guilty partner was stubbornly refusing to repent and give up the adulterous behavior, as in the case of Israel in Jeremiah. This agrees with Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness in Luke: Luke 17:3-4: Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, “I repent,” you must forgive him.¹⁴⁰

What is unusual about Instone-Brewer’s view is that he places an additional qualification on the exception clause—*that it should only be used if the adulterous spouse is unrepentant*.¹⁴¹ In her review of Instone-Brewer’s book

¹⁴⁰ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, 146; Instone-Brewer, *Divorce & Remarriage in the Church*, 68.

¹⁴¹ If the adulterous spouse is not repentant, then the additional qualification is irrelevant because the opportunity to reconcile does not present.

Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible, Jule Ward acknowledges this qualification when she writes: “[Instone-Brewer] argues that the Church needs to reemphasize that believers are called never to break their marriage vows, but that the breaking of vows by a partner who refuses to repent can be valid grounds for divorce.”¹⁴² The implication is that if an adulterous partner has repented and wants to remain married, then the decision to divorce the guilty spouse no longer finds biblical support and is therefore morally wrong. For Instone-Brewer, the reference to stubbornness (i.e., hard-heartedness) is key to understanding the true meaning of the exception clause. He suggests that Jesus was referring to a passage in Jeremiah 4 where God was both rebuking and warning the Southern Kingdom of Judah for being hard-hearted—defined by W.D. Davies and Dale Allison as “moral and spiritual petrification”¹⁴³—and unrepentant like the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been prior to their collapse at the hands of Assyria in 722 B.C.E. Importantly, this rebuke and warning follows Jeremiah 3, where God refers to the Northern Kingdom of Israel as “that faithless one” and a “whore.”¹⁴⁴ In response to this spiritual adultery, God “sent [the Northern Kingdom of Israel] away with a decree of divorce” and warned the Southern Kingdom of Judah through the prophet Jeremiah that a similar outcome was imminent unless they repented of their waywardness.¹⁴⁵ The relevance of this passage for Instone-Brewer is that God offers another opportunity for the Southern Kingdom to return to him, its husband, even after it has committed spiritual adultery.¹⁴⁶ However, the one requirement is that they choose to not be hard-hearted and to repent. Instone-Brewer believes that it is likely that Jesus’ allusion to hardness of heart in Matthew 19:8 and Mark 10:5 refers to this set of events in Jeremiah 3 and 4 because there is no other place in the Old Testament that includes clear references to both hard-

¹⁴² Jule DeJaeger Ward, “Review of *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context*, by David Instone-Brewer,” *Theological Studies* 65 (2004): 179.

¹⁴³ W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *Commentary on Matthew XIX–XXVIII*, vol. 3, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ed. J.A. Emerton, C.E.B. Cranfield, and G.N. Stanton (London: T&T Clark, 2000), 14.

¹⁴⁴ Jer. 3:6.

¹⁴⁵ Jer. 3:8.

¹⁴⁶ Jer. 3:13–14; 4:1.

heartedness and divorce in the same passage. Therefore, Instone-Brewer argues that God's declaration that he is willing to remain and reconcile with his adulterous spouse (i.e. the Southern Kingdom of Judah) so long as it ceases to be hard-hearted and repent is a key text for making sense of what Jesus meant by the exception clause. Like God (in reference to his attitude and act toward the Southern Kingdom of Judah in Jeremiah's day), an innocent spouse is only justified in divorcing an adulterous spouse if the latter refuses to repent due to hard-heartedness. In more discipleship-oriented terms, God's example carries normative force for Christians, and considering how God responded to Judah's adultery, the exception clause obligates Christians to respond in the same way if the condition of repentance is satisfied. If the condition is not satisfied, then the innocent spouse can invoke the clause and end the marriage, but if the adulterous spouse repents, the innocent spouse is obligated to remain and reconcile.

For Instone-Brewer, forgiving an adulterous spouse who is repentant requires the additional step of remaining and reconciling. This view suggests that if someone is not willing to remain and reconcile with an adulterous spouse who is repentant, then this is proof that the innocent spouse has not truly forgiven from the heart. If Instone-Brewer is correct that forgiving necessitates reconciling, then this would defeat my argument. After all, if the command to remain and reconcile with an adulterous spouse who is repentant is implicit in the command to forgive another person, then the act must be classified as a duty and consequently, cannot be regarded as supererogatory. However, I believe that Instone-Brewer makes a crucial mistake in arguing that the act of forgiving obligates a person to remain and reconcile, resulting in a loss of moral freedom as well as oppression for the innocent spouse.

There are three reasons to reject Instone-Brewer's claim that the exception clause only applies if the adulterous spouse is unrepentant. First, there is reason to think that Jesus' reference to hard-heartedness does not refer only to the hard-heartedness that would prevent the adulterous spouse from reconciling with the innocent spouse. Wayne Grudem offers a different assessment which challenges Instone-Brewer's interpretation. This calls into

question Instone-Brewer's use of Jeremiah 3 and 4 to defend his view which is significant due to the fact this is the primary passage that he employs to substantiate his claim. This reveals the second weakness of his view which is that Instone-Brewer's claim primarily depends on a single passage in the Old Testament that is not even about marriage between a man and a woman. The third problem is that Instone-Brewer's position is oppressive for the innocent spouse, robbing them of a guilt-free option to decide for themselves whether to remain and reconcile with the adulterous spouse or to divorce.

Contrary to Instone-Brewer, Grudem offers a different view of what Jesus meant by "hard-heartedness." He writes:

Jesus's statement "Because of your hardness of heart . . ." should not be understood to mean that only "hard-hearted" people initiate divorces, but rather, "because your hard-hearted rebellion against God led to serious defilement of marriages." The presence of sin in the community meant that some marriages would be deeply harmed by hard-hearted spouses, and therefore Moses "allowed" the other spouse to obtain a divorce. God was providing a partial remedy for the harm that a hard-hearted husband or wife could do to the other person in the marriage.¹⁴⁷

The significance of this view is that the hard-heartedness is ascribed to adulterous spouses in general rather than to a more restricted subset (i.e., adulterous spouses that have not repented). In Grudem's view, hard-heartedness (presumably toward both God and the spouse) is the root from which the adulterous act springs. Therefore, all adulterous spouses can be said to be hard-hearted at the time when adultery was committed. This challenges Instone-Brewer's use of Jeremiah 3–4 to defend his position because if the exception clause applies when an adulterous spouse is hard-hearted but all adulterous acts are viewed as a fruit of hard-heartedness, then the exception clause would apply in all adulterous cases rather than only to the subset of unrepentant cases specified by Instone-Brewer. Ultimately, Grudem's view makes it possible for an innocent spouse to not remain and reconcile even if the adulterous spouse is repentant and to also avoid the moral charge of hard-heartedness themselves. This is important because it is

¹⁴⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 808.

a step toward showing that while the act of forgiving is obligatory, the subsequent act of remaining and reconciling is not. I do not pretend that Grudem's view is a conclusive rebuttal of Instone-Brewer's position. My only aim is to show that one is justified in rejecting Instone-Brewer's view that forgiveness entails marital reconciliation when the adulterous spouse is repentant.

So far we have looked at two reasons why Instone-Brewer's view can be rejected. Others agree that the command to forgive in other places of Scripture does not forbid a person from using the exception clause even if their spouse is repentant after committing adultery. For example, David Turner writes:

Even in the case of marital infidelity, divorce should not be the first option. The deep wounds caused by marital infidelity can be healed by the love of God in Christ. Couples contemplating divorce must contemplate the implications of [Matthew] 18:21–35 and [Matthew] 19:8. When one is sinned against, forgiveness is the primary Christian duty. Forgiveness can lead to restored relationships...¹⁴⁸

Turner stresses that if the innocent spouse forgives the adulterous spouse, this act of obedience *can* lead to a restored relationship (i.e., a reconciled marriage). Instone-Brewer would agree thus far. However, Turner's statement implies something more. The key word here is "can." The use of this word leaves open the possibility that there will be occasions when a person forgives an adulterous spouse without wanting to remain and reconcile. Might it be ideal to not only forgive, but reconcile? Yes. But is it required? No. Even Saint Augustine appears to take this position, although his view is nuanced. He states that divorce is warranted in cases when a spouse has committed adultery. However, he also believes that if the innocent spouse has a strong enough faith and if both spouses are humble, then reconciliation will be easy.¹⁴⁹ Part of the defense that he gives for such an audacious claim is that "a husband should forgive what the Lord, the Lord of them both, has forgiven

¹⁴⁸ Turner, *Matthew: Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 463.

¹⁴⁹ Augustine, *Adulterous Marriages, in Marriage and Virginity*, trans. Ray Kearney, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999), 169, 171-172.

. . .”¹⁵⁰ At this point, it seems as though Augustine’s words would lend support to Instone-Brewer’s additional qualification. In other words, genuine forgiveness requires reconciliation. Yet Augustine goes on to say of reconciliation: “It is true, we see, that sometimes this cannot be done; no one forces anyone to do it.”¹⁵¹ He seems to be saying that although faith makes reconciliation possible, no one is forced to it. This suggests that even if the adulterous spouse is repentant, an innocent spouse does not commit a moral wrong if they divorce the adulterous spouse. Granted, Augustine would be quick to add that a refusal to remain and reconcile when the adulterous spouse is repentant is a symptom of the following two deficiencies: (1) a lack of faith, and (2) an inability to view the adulterous partner as forgiven by God. He even goes as far as to write that the guilty partner ought not even be labeled an adulteress because “sins are forgiven through the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven,”¹⁵² and that this is part of the reason why “reconciliation between husbands and wives, even after adultery has been committed and expiated, will not be degrading or difficult.”¹⁵³ Yet, as pointed out, Augustine unequivocally states that God does not *require* one to remain and reconcile.¹⁵⁴ No matter the response of the adulterous spouse, a genuine moral option exists for the innocent spouse.

I would like to conclude my critique of Instone-Brewer’s additional qualification thesis by expanding on the earlier claim that his view is oppressive for innocent spouses because it strips them of a genuine moral option. His view might be easier to accept if we were considering only one instance of adultery in a marriage, especially if it is what Hollinger refers to as an “accidental” affair. An “accidental” affair is one in which there is “no advanced

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 169.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 172.

¹⁵² Ibid., 172.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 172.

¹⁵⁴ One very important aspect of Augustine’s theology is that if the innocent spouse does choose to divorce, he (or she) still cannot remarry. Based primarily on 1 Cor. 7:39 (“A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord.”), Augustine argues that only death releases a person from the marriage covenant so that they do not commit adultery when remarrying.

planning.”¹⁵⁵ Though the act would still cause great pain to the innocent spouse, the one consolation might be that the adulterous spouse did not intend that day to meet another and engage in sex. The act is spontaneous and not premeditated, and the lack of forethought might actually increase the likelihood that the innocent spouse not only forgives, but chooses to remain and reconcile the marriage. On the other hand, a “romantic” affair—one that has “[culminated] in a deep relationship of love”¹⁵⁶—would most likely lessen the likelihood that the innocent spouse would want to seek marital reconciliation with an adulterous spouse (assuming they are repentant). The thought of the adulterous spouse not only having sex, but actually loving another person, might seem too great an obstacle to work through. It might simply be the case that the innocent spouse is too wounded that the other could contemplate sharing not only their body, but their heart and life with someone else. This betrayal would surely be felt more deeply than what would be experienced following an accidental affair. Yet even after a “romantic” affair, the innocent spouse has, according to Instone-Brewer, no choice but to forgive and reconcile the marriage so long as the adulterous spouse is repentant and desires reconciliation. But pretend that this “romantic” affair is with the innocent spouse’s sibling or best friend. Can we really expect the innocent spouse to not only forgive, but also to remain and reconcile the marriage? Would God require it? It seems that Instone-Brewer’s interpretation of what Jesus meant by hard-heartedness does requires it, and if the innocent spouse refuses to reconcile, then this is to serve as evidence that the person has not really forgiven the guilty partner. I suggest that this interpretation can lead to an innocent spouse being victimized, trapped, and ultimately taken advantage of if they truly do not have the option to forgive but not reconcile the marriage. Ultimately, Instone-Brewer’s view lacks compassion and gives preference to the adulterous spouse, even at the expense of the innocent spouse’s psychological and spiritual health.

¹⁵⁵ Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex*, 168.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.

Because Instone-Brewer uses the passage about forgiveness in Luke 17 to support his view that forgiving also means reconciling, I have taken some liberty to revise this verse to fit what Instone-Brewer appears to argue: “And if the same [spouse commits adultery] against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive [and be reconciled].” The point in this revision is to show just how implausible such an interpretation can be if you argue that forgiving an adulterous spouse also requires reconciling the marriage. Though the language is a bit hyperbolic in Matthew’s account (i.e., 77 times or 490 times), the same overall point is made: “forgiveness is not to be limited.”¹⁵⁷ While Christians are obligated to forgive,¹⁵⁸ nothing is explicitly stated or seemingly implied about a required subsequent act of reconciliation. To reason otherwise would result—admittedly with a dose of hyperbole—in the ridiculous conclusion that if a spouse commits adultery seven times in a day with seven different people but repents after each sin, then the innocent spouse must forgive and remain in the marriage each time.

In response, someone could argue that if an adulterous spouse is truly repentant, they would not commit adultery again, and especially not in the near future. Thus, if the adulterous spouse is continuing to commit adultery, they must not be repentant, and therefore the innocent spouse can divorce them, based on Instone-Brewer’s view. This might be what Instone-Brewer is referring to when he writes: “divorce is ‘allowed’ if one partner stubbornly continues to break the vows, as Israel did when God divorced her.”¹⁵⁹ This suggests that a person can never commit adultery for a second time with a

¹⁵⁷ Anthony Bash, *Forgiveness and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 96. In a footnote, Bash acknowledges that there is a debate among biblical scholars as to whether Jesus said “seventy plus seven” or “seventy multiplied by seven”. However, Bash rightly follows this observation with the phrase: “Whichever is right makes little difference, for the point is that forgiveness is not to be limited.”

¹⁵⁸ Concerning Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness in Luke 17:3–4, Bash writes: The number seven indicates completion or perfection, and what Jesus means is that, no matter how many the wrongs are and no matter how frequently they recur, a victim must go on forgiving a repentant wrongdoer.” Bash goes on to write that because Peter does not “distinguish between repentant and unrepentant wrongdoers” in Matt. 18:21–22, we have reason to believe that Jesus is also teaching that we should “strive to forgive” unrepentant wrongdoers as well. See Bash, *Forgiveness and Christian Ethics*, 96.

¹⁵⁹ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, 146.

different person—whether it be one year, five years, or 25 years after the first occurrence—unless the guilty spouse is “stubborn” (i.e., not really repentant). If this were the case, then it would suggest that a spouse who is genuinely repentant will never commit the same sin twice. Therefore, an innocent spouse would never be faced with a having to forgive a spouse who is guilty of adultery more than once. However, this is too naive a view of human nature, considering the all-too-human reality of moral and spiritual weakness that even Christians can experience. It is possible to sin in the same way on multiple occasions even though a person is both sorrowful and repentant each time. Who has not experienced this in one way or another? Committing adultery for a second or third time does not mean that the person was not genuinely repentant after the first occurrence; rather, it is a testimony to our weakness as human beings no matter what our good intentions may be.

It is helpful to consider two distinct definitions for “forgive” and “reconcile.” According to *Oxford Dictionaries*, the word “forgive” means: “Stop feeling angry or resentful towards (someone) for an offense, flaw, or mistake”¹⁶⁰ This same source also states that forgiveness entails that a person no longer wishes punishment on the offender.¹⁶¹ The word “reconcile” means: “Restore friendly relations between.”¹⁶² As defined, the act of forgiving someone is a psychological act with social implications¹⁶³ while the act of reconciling is a social act with psychological implications. These definitions allow for a clear distinction between the two acts. If the innocent spouse desires to reconcile the marriage, forgiveness is necessary. This will require what Everett Worthington labels “emotional forgiveness” as opposed to mere “decisional forgiveness.” Decisional forgiveness is “arrived at rationally or by will,” and while it is “aimed at controlling future behavior,” it is not aimed at

¹⁶⁰ “Forgive.” *Oxford Dictionaries | English*, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/forgive>.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² “Reconcile.” *Oxford Dictionaries | English*, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/reconcile>.

¹⁶³ This is not always the case. Someone may choose to forgive another person though the other person does not want to continue the relationship. In this case, forgiveness only helps the person forgiving to let go of bitterness and resentment, but it accomplishes nothing socially.

controlling motives or emotions.¹⁶⁴ Most likely, decisional forgiveness would not be enough for marital reconciliation to occur, though it could begin the process if both parties are willing. On the other hand, emotional forgiveness according to Worthington is the “replacing of negative, unforgiving stress emotions”¹⁶⁵ such as “resentment, bitterness, hostility, hatred, anger, and fear”¹⁶⁶ with “positive, other-oriented emotions.”¹⁶⁷ If the innocent spouse chooses to reconcile the marriage, then it is emotional forgiveness that must eventually occur. Concerning relationships in general, Worthington writes: emotional forgiveness “may improve interactions and promote reconciliation.”¹⁶⁸

Whereas reconciling the marriage with a spouse who has committed adultery will eventually require forgiveness, I am arguing that the reverse—that forgiveness requires marital reconciliation—is not what Jesus taught. A person can forgive without reconciling, for they may be able to “stop feeling angry and resentful” but still not want to reconcile the marriage for any number of reasons. Consider the following scenario:

Brandon and Sarah are married and have been for five years. In the last three months, Brandon has committed adultery with another woman with whom he works. Although Sarah still loves Brandon and deeply desires that he be happy, Sarah cannot be in the same physical space as Brandon without reliving the emotional pain of betrayal each time. In some sense, this is evidence of how deeply she loves Brandon and for that reason, how deeply his infidelity wounded her. After receiving consistent counseling from both a pastor and a psychologist for several months, getting involved in a local support group, and getting her mind off of the pain by serving others, she no longer feels angry or resentful towards Brandon. She truly wishes him well and wants him to be happy although she still has no desire to reconcile the marriage. She feels that she would be better off either remaining single or eventually starting afresh with someone else in the distant future.

¹⁶⁴ Everett Worthington Jr., *Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 59.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

The above scenario does not strike me as unlikely. After several months and a strong community of support, Sarah *ceased* to experience feelings of anger and resentment. She wishes him well and wants him to be happy.¹⁶⁹ According to the definitions cited earlier, Sarah has forgiven Brandon though she does not believe that she has the emotional capacity to remain and reconcile the marriage. Therefore, she proceeds with the divorce.

It may be the case that she does not think that she could ever trust Brandon again. After all, forgiving someone and trusting someone are two distinct acts. Forgiveness may make trust possible at some point in the future, but there is no guarantee. Concerning the importance of trust, Hollinger writes: “Adultery constitutes such a serious breach of trust that Jesus indicated that it was a ground for divorce.”¹⁷⁰ He continues: “[Divorce] is not necessary and is not ideal, but is allowable. The ideal is always forgiveness and reconciliation which often takes time, patience, and God’s grace because the nature of adultery is so pernicious.”¹⁷¹ Grenz also emphasizes that broken trust may be the main reason that two partners make the ultimate decision to end the marriage following adultery. He writes: “Unfaithfulness constitutes the ultimate breach of marital trust. . . . It does not make divorce inevitable. But it increases the risk.”¹⁷² Although Hollinger does not shy away from presenting God’s ideal, he also makes the realistic point that there will be cases when an innocent spouse’s broken trust is—as Blomberg expresses—*irreparable*.¹⁷³ Concerning the “not ideal, but allowable” point, Andrew Osborn uses the analogy of the body and the need to sever a limb to explain. He writes:

If a medical man were asked if it were right to cut off a hand or a foot, he could only reply that to do so would be mutilation, and that mutilation

¹⁶⁹ In a chapter about forgiveness in *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis writes that to forgive someone and to love them is to “[wish] them well, not feeling fond of him nor saying he is nice when he is not.” See C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, in *The C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York: HarperOne, 2017): 101.

¹⁷⁰ Hollinger, *Sex in Marriage*, 169.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 169; Joel and Paul Feinberg say the same, writing: “When a marriage is strained—even in a case where one of the partners has committed porneia—reconciliation is still possible, and it is the preferred response.” See Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 633.

¹⁷² Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 130.

¹⁷³ See Blomberg, “Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy,” 182; see also Smedes, *Sex for Christians*, 200.

is definitely wrong. But, if he were asked in a particular case whether it was necessary to remove a limb in the interests of the body as a whole, his answer might be just as clearly that it should be taken off. . . . Applying the same process of reasoning to the marriage relationship, we must admit that in some cases there is no alternative to separation, whereas in others judgement and tact might restore harmony. Separation is essentially wrong, just as it is wrong to sever an arm or a leg, but, if the social unit is failing to function and it has proved impossible to restore balance and harmony . . . it may sometimes prove best to dissolve the partnership.¹⁷⁴

While divorce is always to be viewed as a tragic failure of God's creation ordinance to "cling" to one's spouse and life as "one flesh,"¹⁷⁵ a realistic Christian ethic takes into account the fact that in "certain situations [divorce] could loom as a better course of action than any available alternative."¹⁷⁶ If an innocent spouse really believes that they will never be able to trust the adulterous spouse again, then it is probably best that they seek a divorce for the simple reason that the lack of trust will prevent a reconciliation in all of its fullness from ever materializing. Therefore, the inability to trust a spouse who has committed adultery—even if they are repentant—would be a strong reason in favor of getting a divorce. Of course, Instone-Brewer would most likely not agree, because if the adulterous spouse is repentant, then the innocent spouse must reconcile the marriage regardless of whether they currently think that they will ever be able to trust the other again. This view seems harsh, failing to give the innocent spouse the liberty to end the marriage if they do not think they can ever trust again. Smedes writes: "Adultery can wound the relationship so deeply and violate the moral contract so flagrantly that, in some instances, a genuine renewal of marriage is not possible."¹⁷⁷ However, if we reject Instone-Brewer's additional qualification the exception clause can be understood as a God-sanctioned, compassionate permission for those who cannot imagine ever trusting the adulterous spouse again.

¹⁷⁴ Andrew R. Osborn, *Christian Ethics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 181–182. In this context, Osborn uses the word "separation" as synonymous with divorce.

¹⁷⁵ Gen. 2:24.

¹⁷⁶ Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 132.

¹⁷⁷ Smedes, *Sex for Christians*, 200.

The bottom line is that Instone-Brewer takes the decision to remain and reconcile out of the hands of the victim and places it into the hands of the guilty spouse. For this reason, his view appears to be oppressive, favoring the adulterous spouse at the expense of the innocent spouse who is a victim. For this reason and the other two previously mentioned, I believe that Instone-Brewer's additional qualification thesis is neither the best nor most desirable interpretation of the exception clause. The innocent spouse's act of remaining and reconciling with an adulterous spouse is not obligatory because the exception clause applies whether the adulterous spouse is repentant or not. Consequently, the first criterion of supererogation—that an act is not obligatory—is satisfied.

Remaining and Reconciling is Not Forbidden for the Innocent Spouse

I now want to argue that the act of remaining and reconciling with a spouse who has committed adultery is not forbidden (i.e., the innocent spouse is not obligated to divorce the adulterous spouse). If successful, then the second criterion of supererogation—that the act in question is not morally forbidden—will be satisfied.

At first glance, it might seem obvious that the act of remaining and reconciling with an adulterous spouse is not forbidden and that this criterion does not need defending. However, this was not the predominant view among religious leaders in Jesus' day. As Instone-Brewer notes, "early rabbis believed that God commanded divorce when adultery had occurred."¹⁷⁸ This belief is on display in the Pharisees' response to Jesus: "Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?"¹⁷⁹ This response reveals the Pharisees' belief that an innocent spouse was not morally permitted to remain and reconcile with an adulterous spouse. Other biblical scholars have made similar claims, noting that Jewish laws required a man to

¹⁷⁸ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, 143.

¹⁷⁹ Matt. 19:7.

divorce their wife if she committed adultery.¹⁸⁰ In order to demonstrate that the act in question is not forbidden and therefore is a candidate for supererogation in Protestant ethics, it must be shown that Jesus did not consent to the Pharisees' belief that the innocent spouse was forbidden from remaining and reconciling with the adulterous spouse.

As recorded in Matthew 19, the entire conversation about divorce began with the Pharisees asking Jesus the following question: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?"¹⁸¹ The phrase "for any cause" is extremely important and, like the exception clause, is yet another example of Matthew inserting a phrase that is not found in the Markan or Lukan accounts. The significance of the phrase is that it represented the views of Rabbi Hillel and his followers, as opposed to the school of thought associated with Rabbi Shammai. The debate hinged on a phrase found in Deuteronomy 24:1—the only passage in the Pentateuch that treats the matter of divorce directly¹⁸²—which served as the focal point of the debate.¹⁸³ Deuteronomy 24:1 reads: "Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable [*ervat davar*] about her, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house . . ." The ultimate question for the Biblical scholars of Jesus' day was: "How is Deuteronomy 24:1 to be interpreted?"¹⁸⁴ Instone-Brewer writes that *ervat davar* can be translated as "matter of indecency," which is similar to the ESV translation "some indecency." He explains that the Hillelites separated these two words resulting in the view that a divorce could be based on either an act of "indecency" (i.e., adultery) or for "a matter" which they interpreted to mean "any matter."¹⁸⁵ Consequently, the prevailing Hillelite theology of divorce was quite liberal and allowed divorce for

¹⁸⁰ Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 281; Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 121; Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 467. Keener makes the additional comment that not only Jewish Law, but Roman Law also mandated divorce in the case of adultery when Matthew wrote his Gospel.

¹⁸¹ Matt. 19:3.

¹⁸² France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 206.

¹⁸³ Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 463.

¹⁸⁴ Ivor H. Jones, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London: Epworth Press, 1994), 117.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

any cause—even for such mundane acts as failing to prepare a meal properly¹⁸⁶—as opposed to the Shammaites, who interpreted the same phrase as a single linguistic unit meaning “a matter of indecency.”¹⁸⁷ Hillelite theology led to, as Luther preached: “The Jews . . . divorcing their wives for all kinds of reasons whenever they saw fit, even though unchastity was not involved.”¹⁸⁸ Unlike their counterparts, the Shammaites did not separate the words “indecency” and “matter” and therefore believed that the phrase was a unified expression signifying the specific act of adultery. Whereas the Hillelites believed that *any cause* was a *just cause* for divorce, the Shammaites interpreted *ervat davar* in Deuteronomy 24:1 in a much stricter manner to mean that only adultery constituted a *just cause* for divorce.¹⁸⁹ So when Matthew includes the phrase “for any cause” in the Pharisees’ initial question which prompted the dialogue in Matthew 19, it is significant. Ultimately, the religious leaders were trying to get Jesus to take a side in the debate and declare whether the phrase should be interpreted in either a theologically conservative or liberal manner.

Following the initial question, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?” Jesus responded:

Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 207.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁸⁸ Martin Luther, “The Estate of Marriage,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 45, trans. and ed. Walther I. Brandt (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 31.

¹⁸⁹ It would be easy to conclude that the Shammaites viewed adultery as the only grounds for divorce, but this is not the case. Instone-Brewer writes that the Shammaites took this view only as it related to the interpretation of *ervat davar* in Deut. 24:1. In their view, this particular verse permits a man to divorce his wife only in the case of adultery. However, this is not the only passage in the Hebrew Bible that addresses divorce. Based on Exod. 21:10–11, the Shammaites also accepted three other grounds of divorce: the failure of a husband to provide food or clothing and the failure of a husband to fulfill the wife’s “marital rights.” The point here is that the view that adultery is the only justifiable grounds for divorce must be “understood in the context of the debate in which it is spoken, which was a debate about the meaning of Deut. 24.” See Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, 111–112.

¹⁹⁰ Matt. 19:4–6.

At this point, Jesus appears to be teaching that there is no just cause for divorce. This created a sharp theological tension for the Pharisees because they interpreted Deuteronomy 24:1 as Moses *commanding* divorce in certain circumstances, one of which was adultery. This tension is on display in the Pharisees' next question: "Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?"¹⁹¹ Until Matthew 19:8, Jesus seems to be teaching that there is no just cause for divorce, while Moses is interpreted as commanding it. Jesus then responds in verse eight: "It was because you were so hardhearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so." Rather than addressing the interpretation of *ervat davar*, Jesus refers to the will of the Creator in the very beginning when God declared: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh."¹⁹² The strength of this approach is hermeneutical. David Hill writes: "The form of argumentation employed was acceptable in Jewish exegesis: 'the more original, the weightier'; an appeal to God's intention in creation outweighs (but does not therefore annul) the ordinances of Moses."¹⁹³ By redirecting the focus of the debate, Jesus is able to reframe Moses' teaching in Deuteronomy 24:1 as a mere concession that was only granted due to the hardness of heart that characterized the Hebrew people at that time. In other words, God's original intent for marriage to be lifelong "is prior in every sense to the permission and concession offered by Moses [in response to] . . . human failure."¹⁹⁴ John Murray echoes this point, writing: "The Mosaic permission was, therefore, a departure from the creation ordinance and from the practice to which it obligated men."¹⁹⁵ Having recast Moses' words as a mere concession, Jesus is able to say "Moses allowed" in place of the Pharisees' "Moses commanded." Murray writes:

¹⁹¹ Matt. 19:7.

¹⁹² Gen. 2:24.

¹⁹³ Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 279; this point is also made by Leon Morris. See Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 480–481.

¹⁹⁴ Jones, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 117.

¹⁹⁵ Murray, *Divorce*, 32.

There can be no question but the exceptive clause provides an exception to the wrong of putting away. The kind of wrong from which it relieves the husband is not intimated as in Matthew 5:32 but, like the latter passage, it does enunciate a liberty granted to the innocent husband. It does not intimate, any more than Matthew 5:32, that the man is *obligated* to divorce his wife in the event of adultery on her part. It simply accords the right or liberty.¹⁹⁶

After making this all-important distinction between “command” and “allow,” Jesus goes on to say: “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.”¹⁹⁷ After responding that Moses’ never commanded divorce, Jesus makes it clear that no person is ever obligated to divorce. They can, but it is not mandatory. In other words, the act of remaining and reconciling with an adulterous spouse is *not forbidden* because divorce is not required. Consequently, the act in question satisfies the second criterion of supererogation.

Remaining and Reconciling Possesses Moral Worth

Having argued that the innocent spouse’s act of reconciling with the adulterous spouse is neither obligatory nor forbidden, it remains to be shown whether the act possesses moral worth (i.e., is not morally indifferent or trivial). This is necessary for the third criterion of supererogation to be fulfilled. I suggest that not only does the act in question possess moral worth, but is one of the greatest manifestations of *agape* love in Christian practice. In an effort to demonstrate that the act in question satisfies the third criterion of supererogation, I will briefly discuss four attributes of the act: *an instance of God’s forgiveness, holiness-producing, evangelistic, and beneficial for children.*

One of the most obvious reasons that remaining and reconciling with an adulterous spouse possesses moral worth is that this embodies God’s mercy and forgiveness for the partner who has sinned. I can only imagine that after committing adultery, it is very difficult for the guilty spouse—*especially if*

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 35.

¹⁹⁷ Matt. 19:9.

a *Christian*—to forgive oneself. Surely the key to forgiving yourself is to first be able to receive the forgiveness that God has made available through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, for so many people, this is the problem and not the solution. The spouse who has committed adultery cannot forgive themselves *because* they find it impossible to believe that God is able to forgive them for what they have done. A person may reason that their attempt to forgive themselves is empty and futile unless backed by a more authoritative source. In other words, only when a Christian believes that God has forgiven them in Christ do they give themselves cognitive and emotional permission to forgive themselves. Thus, when an innocent spouse chooses to remain and reconcile, they partner with Christ in a mission to make God's love, mercy, and forgiveness tangible for the adulterous spouse. Presumably, this will make it much easier for the adulterous spouse to believe in and accept God's forgiveness. From the perspective of the adulterous spouse, the internal logic might go something like this: *If the spouse whom I have betrayed can not only forgive but also reconcile, then God must also be willing to forgive me and continue our relationship. And if God forgives me, I am free to receive his forgiveness and thereby forgive myself.* Because the act in question can result in the adulterous spouse receiving God's forgiveness, forgiving themselves, and finding deep emotional healing, it possesses moral worth.

Secondly, the act of remaining and reconciling with an adulterous spouse possesses moral worth because it can lead to an increase of holiness in the life of the innocent spouse. The apostle Peter writes: "Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"¹⁹⁸ This command to be holy applies to all Christians everywhere. For Christians, growing in holiness (i.e., sanctification) is a fruit of cooperating with the Holy Spirit—a "conscious engagement"¹⁹⁹—so that his sanctifying work of forming Christ in

¹⁹⁸ 1 Pet. 1:14–16.

¹⁹⁹ Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*, 309.

us over time is not obstructed.²⁰⁰ Concerning the act in question, it is an opportunity for an innocent spouse to voluntarily share in the sufferings of Christ²⁰¹ in order to have Christ formed more deeply within. Difficult conversations, couples' therapy, and enduring an awkward, undefined period of time while issues get sorted out will prove extremely challenging. Most likely, it would be easier for the innocent spouse to divorce and either remain single or remarry someone else. Choosing to remain and reconcile requires that the innocent spouse endure suffering that is not mandatory in order to achieve reconciliation. Concerning the innocent spouse, Smedes writes: "it is also possible that, in forgiveness and understanding, the 'innocent' partner may not choose to interpret the adultery of the spouse as the destruction of their marriage but as a wound that can be healed by love."²⁰² This attitude and subsequent act of remaining and reconciling is a perfect representation of what Christ did at Calvary in order to reconcile sinful human beings with a holy God: *the innocent voluntarily suffers and thereby makes reconciliation possible*. It is a redemptive type of suffering that not only has the potential to save a marriage, but also to enable the innocent spouse to identify with Christ at a deeper, previously unknown level. Stated differently, the choice of the innocent spouse to remain and reconcile can play a significant role in the person's life as a disciple of Jesus Christ. The word "disciple" in the Greek is μαθητής (mathētēs) and occurs 261 times in the New Testament. It means "disciple, student, follower; a committed learner and follower, in the NT usually of Jesus Christ."²⁰³ For the innocent spouse, making the difficult choice to remain and reconcile when it is not required is an opportunity to become more like Christ which can be described in more discipleship-oriented terms as being an

²⁰⁰ Concerning the idea of holiness being an effect of both God's grace at work in us and the effort we expend to yield to that grace, I have in mind Phil. 2:12–13. Paul writes: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

²⁰¹ Phil. 3:10.

²⁰² Smedes, *Sex for Christians*, 197–198.

²⁰³ William D. Mounce, "μαθητής," in *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 306.

attentive *student* of Christ. Bringing the concepts of marriage and discipleship together, Richard Hays writes:

Within Mark's Gospel, this teaching on divorce occurs in the central section of teachings on discipleship (8:31–10:45). . . . At first glance, the controversy discourse pericope on divorce (10:2–12) seems to sit oddly in this context, both form-critically and materially. Why has Mark placed this unit here rather than in one of his two major collections of controversy materials (2:1–3:6 and 11:27–12:37)? Upon reflection, the answer becomes clear: by placing this material in its present narrative location, Mark presents marriage as one aspect of discipleship.²⁰⁴

The difficult choice to remain and reconcile can be embraced by the innocent spouse as a response to the call to discipleship which entails a constant pursuit of holiness.

To a limited degree, this occurs in the life of Hosea, an ancient Hebrew prophet, when God commands him: "Go, marry a promiscuous woman . . ." ²⁰⁵ It appears that among others, there are two reasons why God gives this command: (1) that Hosea will better understand the disappointment and various emotions that God is feeling as a result of his own bride's (i.e., the nation of Israel) unfaithfulness, and (2) that Hosea receiving back his wife after adultery will serve as an example of the mercy that God is willing to extend to the Jewish people if they will only return. This latter reason is why Hays refers to what is asked of Hosea as a "symbolic plot," ²⁰⁶ for his actions (which God commanded in this instance) also serve as a symbolic picture of what God is willing to do if his people repent. Concerning the first reason, Hosea's obedient act to receive Gomer back after her adultery allowed him to identify emotionally at a deep level with what God was experiencing. This act of identification is important from the perspective of holiness. If growing in holiness is becoming more and more like God, then Hosea's deep identification with God was an opportunity for Hosea to grow in holiness because feeling what God feels can result in a person becoming more like God. Granted, the example of Hosea has limited applicability because unlike the act in question, Hosea was

²⁰⁴ Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 349.

²⁰⁵ Hosea 1:2.

²⁰⁶ Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 362.

commanded to reconcile with his adulterous spouse. On the other hand, the act in question in this chapter is fully optional. That distinction aside, the case of Hosea offers a prime example of how the act of returning and reconciling possesses moral worth because the act can result in an increase of holiness for the innocent spouse. To return to an earlier point, the act in question possesses moral worth because an innocent spouse chooses—by God’s grace—to imitate the example of God by bearing a non-mandatory suffering for the purpose of achieving reconciliation. This is but one way that the act in question is holiness-producing for the innocent spouse.

The third reason that the act in question possesses moral worth is that it is *evangelistic* in nature. There is a clear call in the New Testament for Christians to share the εὐαγγέλιον of Jesus Christ. In light of this command to “be imitators of God, as beloved children,”²⁰⁷ Christians look for ways to partner with Christ whose self-professed mission was to “seek out and to save the lost.”²⁰⁸ Regarding the relationship between the act in question and evangelism, David Turner writes: “Forgiveness can lead to restored relationships and is a powerful testimony to the power of Jesus’s gospel.”²⁰⁹ In essence, a restored relationship has the potential to be an embodied ἀπολογία²¹⁰ of the reality, goodness, and power of God. In addition, the powerful testimony of a restored marriage can be beneficial for those who already profess Christ. Though it goes without saying, Christians are not immune to times of suffering, intense doubt (the existence of God, the goodness of God, etc.), depression, and unfaithfulness. Witnessing a reconciled relationship following an act of adultery can be a catalyst to reawaken and motivate other compromised Christians. The bottom line is that the act in question can be a powerful testimony to both Christians and non-Christians alike and for this reason can be said to possess great moral worth.

²⁰⁷ Eph. 5:1.

²⁰⁸ Luke 19:10.

²⁰⁹ Turner, *Matthew: Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 463.

²¹⁰ 1 Pet. 3:17.

The fourth and last reason why the act in question possesses moral worth is that keeping the home together is likely to be in the best interest of children. Granted, if the innocent spouse chooses to remain and reconcile without truly forgiving the adulterous spouse, this will only result in a bitter, tense, unhealthy atmosphere at home. This would obviously not be beneficial for children. It would be better for the innocent spouse to take advantage of the exception clause and divorce the adulterous spouse than to seek a superficial reconciliation. However, if the innocent spouse forgives the adulterous spouse and chooses to remain and reconcile, then it is safe to assume that healing will eventually occur in the marriage and that the home atmosphere will be a healthy, safe place for any children.

I began this section by proposing that the act of choosing to remain married to an adulterous spouse in an effort to reconcile is supererogatory. This required defending the view that the act is neither commanded nor forbidden by Jesus and that it possesses moral worth. Regarding this third criterion, the following four reasons were briefly discussed in support of the claim that the act in question possesses moral worth: (1) the act makes God's mercy and forgiveness more tangible for the adulterous spouse; (2) the act can lead to an increase of holiness in the life of the innocent spouse; (3) the act is a powerful testimony to the reality, goodness, and power of Jesus Christ; and (4) the act can keep the home together which is in the best interest of children. Having presented my argument, one interesting question arises: *If this act is supererogatory because it is neither commanded nor forbidden by Jesus and because it possesses moral worth (assuming a proper motive), then what prevents the act of marrying from also being supererogatory?*²¹¹ In response to this question, one might ask: "Why is it significant if the act of marrying is also classified as supererogatory?" The second question is significant because if my account allows for marriage to be supererogatory, then this is problematic due to the fact that the New Testament never gives

²¹¹ I was asked this question after sharing a paper at the Society for the Study of Theology's 2019 annual conference. The person who asked the question chose to remain anonymous when I asked about including this in my thesis.

even the slightest impression that marriage might be supererogatory. Therefore, if my account allows for it, then I see this as a problem. For this reason, I want to explain why marriage is not supererogatory in my view.

What rational support can be provided for denying the act of marriage supererogatory status? Although I do not intend to go into great detail, I once again invoke the concept of vocation, which has occupied an important place in my thesis thus far. If there is a positive call not only to celibacy but also to marriage, as Karl Rahner suggests, then both celibacy and marriage can be viewed as a response to God's call (i.e., call understood as a command). A positive call to marriage means that although the married life is one in which a person's "interests are divided,"²¹² this by no means implies that it is *morally* inferior, because it is God's will for each person that receives the call. This means that marriage would be obligatory for every person who is not called to live celibately. As mentioned earlier, Glaser writes: "this inability to live as virgin or widow is a sign that such a state in life is not the specific one to which this individual is called; it is not his specific charisma-grace."²¹³ Granted, he admits that he does not know if marriage, like celibacy, should be considered a charisma that is also accompanied with necessary "gifts and talents" for living such a life, but he also does not rule out the option.²¹⁴ In response, it seems strange that there would be a positive call for one but not the other. This is what makes the asymmetry in Glaser's view not only awkward, but undesirable, because it suggests—to the detriment of the majority²¹⁵—that God might not view those who marry as needing a specific grace to live that life faithfully. I suspect that most married Christians would disagree for the simple fact that marriage—in the midst of its great joys and delights—can be challenging at times. It seems more logical to say that there is either a positive call that precedes both vocations or a call to none.

²¹² 1 Cor. 7:34.

²¹³ Glaser, "Commands-Counsels," 285.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 279.

²¹⁵ Balthasar, "A Theology of the Evangelical Counsels," 222.

If Rahner is right and both celibacy and marriage are preceded by a positive call to an individual, then this would mean that a person is either obligated to marry or obligated to be celibate. Furthermore, striving to live a celibate life when one is called to marry (and vice versa) would not be supererogatory, but rather an act of disobedience. And trying to live a married life even though one is called to celibacy would also be disobedient. While retaining the notion of counsels, von Balthasar seems to affirm this last point: “The decision to embrace the evangelical counsels depends on a personal experience of being called (if this is lacking, it would be imperfect, even sacrilegious, to enter this state, and it would be decidedly more perfect to choose to remain in the world).”²¹⁶ When Balthasar uses the phrase, “in this world,” he means one of two ways in which “the Lord calls to men.” In his view, a person is called either “out of the world” or “to stand in the world.” Though an oversimplification of his view, celibacy is an example of the former whereas marriage is an example of the latter.²¹⁷ It is of great significance that von Balthasar suggests that a person could be committing an act of sacrilege if they attempt to live a celibate life when they have been called to marry and vice versa. Concerning my effort to show that marriage is not supererogatory, this point is crucial. If there is a positive call to marriage, then a person’s relationship to marriage takes one of two directions based on whichever call they have received: (1) it is an act of obedience if they have been called to marriage; or (2) it is an act of disobedience if they have been called to celibacy. What this vocation-based view of both marriage and celibacy suggests is that there is not a situation where marriage can qualify as supererogatory. This removes the possibility of marriage being “optional,” which is an essential characteristic of a supererogatory act due to the fact that supererogatory acts are neither obligatory nor forbidden. I now transition to the last of three major sections that comprise this chapter.

Two Additional Scenarios

²¹⁶ Ibid., 225.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 222.

In the previous section, I addressed a simple version of adultery for the general purpose of demonstrating that there is at least one act of supererogation in Protestant ethics. I now turn my attention to answer the following two questions in order: (i) In the case that the innocent spouse wants to remain and reconcile, is the *guilty* spouse's act to return and reconcile also supererogatory? (ii) In the case of double-adultery, does the classificatory status of the guilty spouse's act to reconcile change? The distinctive feature of the latter situation is that both spouses—as opposed to one—are guilty of adultery. As previously mentioned, these two distinct scenarios are closely related to the act of supererogation discussed in section two of this chapter. The three theological commitments named in the first part of section two are once again assumed in answering these two questions.

Question 1

At the risk of sounding redundant, the first question that I would like to address is: *In the case that the innocent spouse wants to remain and reconcile, is the choice by the guilty spouse to reconcile the marriage also supererogatory?* Or, is the act not supererogatory since they are the guilty party? I will argue that in a case involving an innocent and guilty spouse, the latter's choice to reconcile the marriage—unlike the innocent spouse's act—is *not* supererogatory.

Imagine the following scenario, which was used earlier in the chapter and has now been revised:

Brandon and Sarah are both Christians and have been married for five years. In the last three months, Brandon has committed adultery with another woman with whom he works. After months of painstaking emotional work, Sarah has decided that she wants to remain and reconcile with Brandon if he is willing. The couple have kept in touch over the last few months and Sarah calls Brandon to communicate her decision. She includes stipulations such as (1) increased accountability, (2) that Brandon find another job, and (3) that they undergo marriage counseling until Sarah is satisfied with their progress. Upon hearing Sarah's desire and conditions, Brandon informs Sarah that he would

like to reconcile and salvage their marriage. Both do what is required and as a result, save their marriage.

Unlike the original version earlier in the chapter, Sarah decides that she wants to remain and reconcile with Brandon. In response, Brandon makes the decision to reconcile as well. As stated earlier, it is my view that Brandon's choice and subsequent act of reconciliation with Sarah is—unlike Sarah's choice to reconcile—*not* supererogatory. The reason for my claim is straightforward: Brandon's spouse did not commit adultery whereas Sarah's spouse did. In other words, the innocent spouse's act of reconciling and the guilty spouse's act of reconciling are asymmetrical. This can be demonstrated using *modus ponens*²¹⁸ to frame Sarah's and Brandon's respective acts in light of the inherent logic in Jesus' teaching about divorce in Matthew's Gospel. In order to defend the view that Brandon's act is not supererogatory, it is helpful to begin by employing a *modus ponens* to reveal part of the logic that supports the claim that Sarah's act to remain and reconcile is supererogatory. Using *modus ponens*, the logic inherent in Jesus' teaching is as follows:

- Premise 1 If a spouse has committed adultery, then the other spouse is permitted to divorce.
- Premise 2 Sarah's spouse has committed adultery.
- Conclusion Therefore, Sarah is permitted to divorce her spouse.

Based on the words of Jesus concerning divorce in Matthew's Gospel, Sarah is permitted to divorce which opens the door for the supererogatory act of remaining and reconciling.²¹⁹ On the other hand, this same Matthean-based logic reveals that Brandon's act of reconciling with Sarah is *not* supererogatory. In order to remain consistent, the first proposition in the previous *modus ponens* has been restated in negative terms in the following argument in order to avoid the *denying the antecedent* fallacy.

- Premise 1 If a spouse has not committed adultery, then the other spouse is not permitted to divorce.²²⁰

²¹⁸ *Modus ponens* argument form: (Premise 1) If P, then Q. (Premise 2) P. (Conclusion) Q.

²¹⁹ I have discussed and defended this position in detail in section two of this chapter. Therefore, I am not elaborating here.

²²⁰ At this point, one might suggest that this argument is shortsighted because Paul describes another type of situation where a Christian is permitted to divorce. In 1 Cor. 7:12–

Premise 2 Brandon's spouse has not committed adultery.
Conclusion Therefore, Brandon is not permitted to divorce his spouse.

A *modus ponens* is a valid argument form and is therefore truth-preserving. This means that if the premises are true (and of course related to each other in content), then the conclusion necessarily follows. In the case that an argument form is valid, and the premises are also true, the argument can be deemed sound. Assuming that the above premises are true in both arguments, then both arguments are sound.

The logic of both arguments shows the disjunct in classification between Sarah and Brandon's acts. On the surface, it would appear that both spouses perform the same act: *reconciling with the other spouse*. However, this is not the case because the contexts of their acts are very different. Based on Jesus' teaching on divorce in Matthew, Brandon is not permitted to divorce Sarah because Sarah has not committed adultery. To express it differently, whereas the exception clause applies to Sarah's act because her spouse committed adultery, it does not apply to Brandon's act because his spouse has not committed adultery. If my reasoning is correct, then one corollary is that if Sarah wants to remain and reconcile, then Brandon is obligated by God to do so. And if this last claim is right, then Brandon's act of reconciling with Sarah is a moral duty. Of course, he can choose not to obey, but this is another matter. Therefore, in the case that Sarah chooses to remain and reconcile, Brandon's act of reconciliation is right to do and wrong not to do. Ergo, it is not supererogatory. As I have attempted to show, this results in a different classification of the same act depending upon whether the innocent or guilty spouse is performing the deed.

15, Paul writes that a believing spouse is free to divorce if an unbelieving spouse wants to end the marriage because of the other spouse's Christian faith. This most likely would happen in a situation where two people who are not Christians marry each other. Then, one spouse becomes a Christian at a later point and the unbelieving spouse does not want to continue the marriage on these grounds. In this case, Paul seeks to ease the conscience of the believer and permits a divorce: "in such a case the brother or sister is not bound" (1 Cor. 7:15). However, prior to presenting both *modus ponens*, I state that both Brandon and Sarah are Christians. By doing so, I get around the objection that my logic is shortsighted because it doesn't take into account the fact that Paul gave another justifiable reason for divorce.

Question 2

I will now address the following question: *In the case of double-adultery, is the classificatory status of the act of reconciling with the other spouse supererogatory?* This question presents a unique situation concerning supererogation because, unlike the previous two acts, both spouses are now assumed guilty of adultery for the sake of argument. In section two, only the act of the innocent spouse was examined. In the last subsection, only the act of the guilty spouse was examined. In the former situation, the act was supererogatory whereas in the latter it was not. However, in this scenario both spouses are guilty. It would be easy to assume that each spouse's act of reconciling is not supererogatory because the guilty spouse's act of reconciling with an innocent spouse is not as I have just argued. However, this is not the case. For the sake of the question, it is assumed once again that both individuals are Christians, both are genuinely repentant, and both want to reconcile. Using a similar logic as that which was utilized to answer the previous question, I contend that both acts of reconciling are supererogatory in the case of double-adultery.

Unlike the first two acts discussed,²²¹ there is no innocent spouse in this revised set of circumstances. In the last subsection, *modus ponens* was used to indicate that the guilty spouse's act of reconciling with the innocent spouse was not supererogatory. However, in an ironic twist, having two guilty spouses rather than one actually makes a significant moral difference to the classification of the act from the perspective of the guilty spouse. With two guilty spouses, each is the victim of adultery (both being also guilty does not change this fact). A person can be guilty of adultery while simultaneously being the victim of adultery. Concerning the act of reconciling, *modus ponens* proves helpful once again. For purposes of framing the argument, I will once again use the case of Brandon and Sarah except for one significant change: *both are now guilty of adultery*. Using a *modus ponens*, the following two arguments

²²¹ One in section two and the other act discussed in the first subsection of this section.

reveal that neither act of reconciling is obligatory which allows for a supererogatory classification. The first argument is from Sarah' vantage point and the second is from Brandon's.

Premise 1 If a spouse has committed adultery, then the other spouse is permitted to divorce.

Premise 2 Sarah's spouse has committed adultery.

Conclusion Therefore, Sarah is permitted to divorce her spouse.

Premise 1 If a spouse has committed adultery, then the other spouse is permitted to divorce.

Premise 2 Brandon's spouse has committed adultery.

Conclusion Therefore, Brandon is permitted to divorce his spouse.

In both cases, the Matthean-based logic framed with *modus ponens* reveals that neither Brandon nor Sarah is obligated to reconcile with the other. Jesus' condition that one's spouse must have committed adultery in order for the other spouse to be permitted to divorce is satisfied in both scenarios. Unlike the previous example, Brandon's spouse has also committed adultery, so he too is permitted to divorce Sarah whereas before he was not. In an unexpected twist, the case of double-adultery creates a possibility for two acts of supererogation because each partner is the victim of adultery and has the moral permission to divorce the other.

It should now be clear why I used the word "other" rather than "innocent" in the first proposition. If I had said, "If a spouse has committed adultery, then the *innocent* spouse is permitted to divorce," then I would have unjustifiably excluded the possibility of supererogation in the case of double-adultery. The word "unnecessarily" is used because this exclusion would have been unwarranted based on a close reading of Jesus' teaching on divorce in the Gospel of Matthew. What Jesus said was: "whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery."²²² Nowhere does Jesus say or even seem to imply that the permission to divorce an adulterous spouse is only reserved for a spouse if they are innocent of adultery. Instead, the permission to divorce is granted if your spouse has committed adultery. To

²²² Matt. 19:9.

make the claim that the spouse must be innocent in order for the exception clause to apply is to go beyond what Jesus teaches. Simply stated, the Matthean account of Jesus' teaching on divorce does not support the idea that both spouses cannot supererogate in the case of double-adultery.

Having shown that each spouse's act of reconciling with the other in the case of adultery is supererogatory, it remains to be seen whether the act possesses moral worth. In section two, I argued that the innocent spouse's act of remaining and reconciling is supererogatory because in addition to not being required or forbidden, it possesses moral worth for the following four reasons: (1) the act makes God's mercy and forgiveness more tangible for the adulterous spouse; (2) the act can lead to an increase of holiness in the life of the innocent spouse; (3) the act is a powerful testimony to the reality, goodness, and power of Jesus Christ; and (4) the act can keep the home together, which is likely to be in the best interests of children. In order to answer the present question, one minor alteration needs to be made. Rather than the second reason reading, "the act can lead to an increase of holiness in the life of an innocent spouse," it should read, "the act can lead to an increase of holiness in the life of spouse choosing to remain and reconcile" (since neither is innocent). Once this modification has been made, it is clear that these same four characteristics are also true of the act of reconciling in the case of double-adultery. From the perspective of moral worth, there is no difference. Therefore, each spouse's act of reconciling with the other adulterous spouse possesses moral worth. Thus, all three basic criteria for supererogation are satisfied: (1) the act is not obligatory, (2) the act is not forbidden, and (3) the act possesses moral worth. As stated earlier in the chapter, I will argue in chapter four that proper motive is also required if my account of supererogation in Protestant ethics is to accurately reflect the teachings of the New Testament. I will therefore discuss this act further in the latter half of chapter four.

I expect that some may oppose the idea that two people who have committed adultery are now in a unique position to perform an act of supererogation. However, any person that opposes my claims needs to ask the honest question: "Is my objection supported by Scripture or is my objection

primarily emotional in nature?” An emotional objection might be a disguised legalism. In other words, a self-righteous attitude may consciously or unconsciously despise the possibility that someone who has committed a significant moral failure could then turn around and supererogate. Someone might even object on the grounds that my position seems to raise the question that Paul posed to the church in Rome: “Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?”²²³ After all, in the case of double-adultery there are two distinct sins, which makes two acts of supererogation possible instead of only one. In the case of double-adultery, there is an opportunity for more χάρις (grace) to be both realized and shared. However, this is not an excuse to sin, as Paul explains in Romans. Rather, it is a testimony to God’s goodness and power that in the midst of greater sin,²²⁴ “grace [abounds] all the more.”²²⁵ To say it differently, God is able to bring good out of all things, even sin. A case of double-adultery opens the door for the realization, sharing, and glorification of God’s grace through the supererogatory option of reconciliation.

Conclusion

The overall aim of this chapter has been to demonstrate that there is at least one act in Protestant ethics that is supererogatory: *an innocent spouse’s act of remaining and reconciling with a repentant spouse who has committed adultery*. This is also true in the case of double-adultery when both spouses choose to reconcile with the other. This is important for two reasons. First, my account provides an instance of supererogation that is in the Bible, which Protestants treat as the ultimate authoritative source in determining what is true. Secondly, there is good reason to doubt the claim that celibacy is a supererogatory act from a Protestant perspective due to the doctrine of

²²³ Rom. 6:1.

²²⁴ “Greater” is only intended to communicate the quantitative increase of sin in the case of double-adultery as opposed to a case in which only one spouse has committed adultery.

²²⁵ Rom. 5:20.

vocation, so my account is valuable because it provides another possibility that is also found in the Bible.

While suggesting that celibacy might not be supererogatory in Protestant ethics, I discussed Philip Melanchthon's endorsement of celibacy as a counsel in great detail. After stating that Melanchthon's concept of a counsel greatly differed from Aquinas' conception, I then argued that Melanchthon's acceptance of celibacy as a counsel turns out to be a clear affirmation of a type of act that resembles supererogation in every respect. Thus, Melanchthon can be viewed as another example—along with Mellema and the Feinbergs—of a Protestant affirming supererogation. Although his view of celibacy as supererogatory can be challenged using the Protestant idea doctrine of vocation, this does not change the fact that Melanchthon appears to affirm the possibility of supererogation.

Considering the unfortunate fact that divorce will continue to be a part of life, the concept of supererogation can be of significant theological and pastoral value in helping Christian ministers, counselors, and lay persons in the church navigate these waters and help others do the same. Having argued for at least one act of supererogation in Protestant ethics, it remains to be shown whether an additional criterion is required: *proper intention or proper motive*. As previously stated, I argue in the next chapter that proper motive should be embraced as a fourth criterion in a Protestant account of supererogation.

§ 4. Motive, Not Intent: The Fourth Criterion in a Protestant Account of Supererogation

In the last chapter, I argued that there is a clear example of supererogation in the New Testament. The deed satisfies the following three standard criteria for supererogation in moral philosophy: (1) not obligatory, (2) not forbidden, and (3) possesses moral worth. The question now remains: Is there a fourth criterion for supererogation in Protestant ethics? As mentioned in chapter three, I argue in this chapter that right motive, not intent, should be included among the criteria. This would result in a quadripartite theory of supererogation. From the perspective of moral philosophy, this is both interesting and significant, because over the past four decades, the trend in moral philosophy has moved toward intent and away from motive. Accentuating motive rather than intent situates my view closer to the likes of Sheldon Peterfreund, Mark Jackson, and Phillip Montague rather than to David Heyd, who emphasizes *altruistic intent*, and to Alfred Archer who emphasizes *moral intent*.

In order to argue for the primacy of motive in a Protestant account of supererogation, the chapter has been divided into the following five sections: (1) defining the terms: “motive” and “intent”; (2) an argument for motive based on Helmut Thielicke’s motive-centric account of Protestant ethics; (3) addressing the philosophical objection presented by David Heyd and Alfred Archer that only intent, not motive, should be considered in the deontic classification of an act (taken from John Stuart Mill); (4) the application of a motive-account to the act of supererogation in chapter three (an innocent spouse choosing to reconcile with a spouse who has committed adultery but has repented); and (5) the indirect relevance of *character* to acts of supererogation. These five sections are then followed by a summary.

Defining the Terms: *Motive* and *Intent*

This chapter depends on a clear delineation between motive and intent. For this reason, this first section offers an initial definition of the two terms. John and Paul Feinberg write:

How does one know if he is being moral or immoral in his actions? . . . Two answers, though often heard, are wrong. First, some answer that an agent is moral if he does an act that is morally good or refrains from doing a morally evil act. This answer does not emphasize motivations or intentions for doing an act, but merely notes that the agent did what the law demanded. If this sounds familiar, it should, for the Lord frequently rebuked the Pharisees for adopting this approach. They were very careful to conform their actions externally to the law, but Jesus was clear that mere external conformity to the law did not gain eternal reward, nor was it morally acceptable. . . . Traditionally, philosophers and theologians have agreed that something else is required.¹

To place this quote in the larger context of what I am discussing, the Feinbergs are rejecting an approach to classifying acts that omits elements from the inner, psychological world of the agent. What is of interest is that they mention both motives and intentions. After doing so, they take what appears to be a decisive step in writing: “moral praise or blame depends heavily on the agent’s motives for doing what he did,” and “Motivation, then, is crucial in determining whether someone acts morally. . . .”² It seems that they are identifying proper motive, not intent, as a criterion for determining whether someone has acted morally. Granted, they do not refer to supererogatory acts specifically when they discuss motive and intent, but nowhere do they suggest that such acts would be exempt from the deontic requirement that they be performed with proper motive or intent. However, as mentioned towards the end of chapter one, they fail to give a clear definition of either motive or intent. As a result, it is unclear whether they make a clear conceptual distinction between the two terms, or are using them interchangeably when they use the conjunction “or” in the following statement: “This answer does not emphasize motivations or intentions for doing an act . . .” On the one hand, they seem to affirm that proper motive is necessary for a person to act morally, whether the act be obligatory or supererogatory. And based on their discussion of Kant’s

¹ Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 26–27.

² *Ibid.*, 22.

requirement that to act morally one must act from a sense of duty, it seems that they define motive similarly to how I will define the term. In this sense, my argument for proper motive being a criterion for supererogation in Protestant ethics can be first attributed to them. On the other hand, it is unclear how they view intentions. Are they the same as motives? Are they different, and if they are different, how so? In other words, how would they define motive and how would they define intent? And after doing so, would their prioritization of motive be consistent with their definitions? While I must acknowledge their motive-based account of classifying acts (including supererogatory acts), there is still much to be desired in terms of preciseness and clarity. For this reason, a more systematic presentation of a motive-based account of supererogation is needed and should not be viewed as a mere repetition.

In one of the most helpful examples in supererogation literature for distinguishing between motive and intent, Alfred Archer writes:

Suppose a power hungry misanthrope is standing for election as mayor. She wants to be mayor so she can more effectively enact her evil plans. Our election candidate passes a river and hears a drowning child scream for help. She recognizes that saving the child is likely to win her some votes in the forthcoming election. The candidate can be said to be acting with altruistic intent, securing the child's safety is crucial to her plan of securing the townspeople's votes. Her motives though are not altruistic.³

Archer goes on to argue that the woman performs an act of supererogation regardless of her motive because her *intent* was moral. His conclusion aside, this example is helpful because motive and intent are set forth as two distinct concepts. As mentioned in chapter one, this is not always the case. In this example, the motive is to secure the townspeople's votes while the intent is "securing the child's safety." Using this example, Archer appears to present the motive as the reason for which the agent acts. There is a strong precedent for this. Steven Sverdlik also identifies "motive" with the reason that explains why an agent acts. He writes: "Let us suppose for now that the reason S had for doing what she did is her motive for doing it."⁴ One chapter later, he

³ Archer, "Supererogation and Intentions," 450.

⁴ Sverdlik, *Motive and Rightness*, 1.

provides what he calls a formal definition of motive: “The motive of an action is the ultimate desire of the agent that explains its occurrence, or some feature of it.” Sverdlik’s use of the word “desire” might give the impression that the two definitions are not identical. However, he argues that whether a motive takes the form of a reason or emotion, desire is at the root of what makes that reason or emotion a motive. He writes: “I think we can say that all our motives are desires in a broad sense.”⁵ To show how a desire can present as a motive even when not explicitly stated, he writes the following about emotion: “In specifying a person’s motive we often use simple terms like revenge or fear or greed. But such terms are understood to imply the presence of something like a desire. It would be absurd to say that S’s motive was greed but that she had no desire for money. . . . The emotions we regard as motives characteristically generate desires to act in ways related to the content of the emotions.”⁶ Whatever we make of this desire-based account of motive, it is clear that Sverdlik identifies a motive as the reason that compels a person to act no matter what form the reason assumes. It is the reason *why* a person performs a specific act. Here the etymology of the word “motive” is helpful. In a chapter about Thomas Aquinas’ view that motive is part of what specifies a human action, Joseph Pilsner writes: “The word *motivum* is derived from *motus*, the past participle of the Latin verb *movere*, to move. . . . The word *motivum* can refer to anything with the power to move another.”⁷ Although this word can be used in a way that has little to do with human acts, this is not always the case. This idea of a motive “moving” a person to perform certain acts is very similar to the idea that motive explains why a person performs an act. This idea of “moving” is also found in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy’s* definition: “The moving force which leads a person to behave or act in this way rather than in another way. A motive is closely related to our desire for the

⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁶ Ibid., 21.

⁷ Joseph Pilsner, *The Specification of Human Actions in St. Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 200.

objects for which we act.”⁸ In Archer’s example, the woman’s desire to garner the votes of the townspeople was the reason that *moved* her to act. Clearly, garnering additional votes was her motive.

Defining motive as the reason a moral agent performs a particular act finds support from other thinkers as well. In his book *Christian Ethics*, Wayne Grudem writes that when a Christian is trying to make a decision, there are four elements that must be considered. Of these four, the third is motive, which he defines as “the reason why the person does something.”⁹ Concerning motive, John Stuart Mill writes: “He who saves a fellow creature from drowning does what is morally right, whether his motive be duty or the hope of being paid for his trouble; he who betrays the friend that trusts him is guilty of a crime, even if his object be to serve another friend to whom he is under greater obligations.”¹⁰ In the first example, each of the two hypothetical motives mentioned (from a sense of duty or to get paid) answers the question, “Why did X save Y from drowning?” In both cases, Mill’s two potential motives are reasons that would explain why person X saved person Y.¹¹ The bottom line is that conceiving of motive as the reason for doing a particular act seems uncontroversial.

Staying with Archer’s example, how is intent to be defined if a clear distinction between it and motive is to be maintained? In Archer’s example, the intent is clear: securing the child’s safety. *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy* defines “intention” as: “a state of mind directed toward action.”¹² In the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, “intention” is defined as: “a state of mind that is favorably directed towards bringing about (or maintaining, or avoiding) some state of affairs . . . [that] sets the subject on a course to bring that state

⁸ Nicholas Bunnin and Jiyuan Yu, “Motive,” in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 450.

⁹ Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 150.

¹⁰ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 18.

¹¹ Mill, which had a clear influence on David Heyd’s altruistic intent requirement view of supererogation (see chapter one), did not believe that motives mattered in the deontic classification of an act. However, Mill’s stance will be addressed in detail in the next section, so I do not elaborate here.

¹² Bunnin and Yu, “Intention,” in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Philosophy*, 353.

of affairs about.”¹³ Although both convey the same idea, the latter definition is more precise. Using the Oxford Dictionary definition, the woman in Archer’s example acted to bring about the following state of affairs: *securing the child’s safety by rescuing the child*. This aligns nicely with Mill’s definition of intent as well. In a footnote where Mill is drawing a distinction between motive and intent, he defines an intention as, “what the agent wills to do.”¹⁴ The woman in Archer’s example *willed* to save the child from drowning. In other words, the child’s safety was the state of affairs that she was trying to bring about when she acted (i.e., intent). Notice that this does not tell us anything about the reason she performed the act. If Archer had not told us that she wanted to earn additional votes, we would have been left to speculate about her motives (i.e., reasons for acting). After all, the fact that her intent was to save the child tells us nothing about her reasons for doing so. While the intent answers the question, “What state of affairs is the agent aiming to bring about by acting?”, the motive answers the question: “Why does the agent want to achieve this particular outcome?” The importance of my use of the word “aiming” here should not go unnoticed. In the legal field, intention is defined as: “The state of mind of one who aims to bring about a particular consequence.”¹⁵ This is in contrast to “motive,” which is defined by the same source as: “The purpose behind a course of action.”¹⁶ Both definitions lend support for how the two terms are being defined in this chapter. This is worth noting because I suspect that there are few areas other than the legal field where the distinction between intention and motive is given such careful attention due to the fact that the requirements of justice are being decided.

Clearly, a distinction between motive and intent is necessary if acts are to be properly understood and evaluated in relation to supererogation in Protestant ethics (and outside of Protestant ethics too). From this point

¹³ Simon Blackburn, “Intention,” in *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 188.

¹⁴ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 26.

¹⁵ *A Dictionary of Law*, 9th ed., ed. Jonathan Law (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

forward, motive is used to signify “the reason or reasons for which an agent acts” whereas intent is defined as: “a state of mind that is favorably directed towards bringing about (or maintaining, or avoiding) some state of affairs . . . [that] sets the subject on a course to bring that state of affairs about.”

A Motive-Based Account of Supererogation in Protestant Christian Ethics

In chapter three, I argued that according to Jesus’ teaching on divorce in the Gospel of Matthew, the act of remaining and reconciling with an adulterous spouse is supererogatory. Having defined motive as “the reason or reasons for which an agent acts,” it seems inconsistent with Jesus’ emphasis on “the inward dimension of human existence”¹⁷ in the Gospels to say that a person could reconcile with an adulterous spouse for any number of selfish reasons (i.e., motives) but still be said to perform an act of supererogation. As Stanley Grenz writes: “Seen from the perspective of the whole, the biblical viewpoint does not lead to a concern solely for acts in themselves and hence for a pure ethic of doing. In addition to an obvious interest in right actions, the biblical authors display a great concern for what motivates conduct.”¹⁸ Admittedly, Grenz is not concerning himself with the moral classification of acts. However, his point could be viewed as support for the claim that evaluating and classifying an act in Protestant ethics requires that we take the agent’s *motive* into account. As part of my argument, I will now present German theologian Helmut Thielicke’s view that motive is central to Christian ethics.

Thielicke claims that the motive from which an individual acts is what distinguishes Christian ethics from secular ethical theories. He writes: “The specifically ‘Christian’ element in ethics is rather to be sought explicitly and

¹⁷ Grenz, *The Moral Quest*, 108. In support of this claim, Grenz refers to the following verses (to name a few): Matt. 5:20, Matt. 12:33, Mark 7:11, Mark 7:6.

¹⁸ Grenz, *The Moral Quest*, 228.

exclusively in the motivation of the action.”¹⁹ Though he does not have acts of supererogation in mind when he writes about motive, the fact that he is concerned with acts in general is enough to connect his motive-based, Protestant account of moral acts with acts of supererogation in particular (which I have argued exist, whether he would agree or not). My reasoning is straightforward: *If acting with proper motive is required in order to obey God when doing what he has commanded, then it stands to reason that acting with the proper motive is also an essential element in the performance of an act that is supererogatory.* To express this differently, if performing an act that is commanded by God requires an agent to perform the act with a good motive, then performing a supererogatory act as a Christian would also require an agent to perform the act with a good motive.

To understand the importance of Thielicke’s work in relation to my argument for a motive-centric account of supererogation in Protestant ethics, an in-depth account of his view is required. Steven Sverdlik writes: “every tradition that utilizes deontic concepts at all will sometimes make the rightness of an action hinge on its motives.”²⁰ Though I am not comfortable arguing that Christian ethics is solely a deontic affair, I unhesitatingly affirm that the New Testament utilizes deontic concepts. For example, John writes that Jesus once told his disciples, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Another example of the use of deontic concepts in the New Testament is found in what is known as The Great Commission. Prior to his ascension, Jesus speaks the following words to his eleven apostles: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18–20). Later in the New Testament, Paul also does not shy away from using deontic language. On one occasion he writes, “Children, obey your

¹⁹ Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics—Foundations*, ed. William H. Lazareth (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968), 20.

²⁰ Sverdlik, *Motive and Rightness*, 15.

parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord” (Colossians 3:20), and on another occasion, “If a widow has children or grandchildren, they should first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some repayment to their parents; for this is pleasing in God’s sight” (1 Timothy 5:4). Although these verses represent only a small number of verses containing deontic language and concepts in the New Testament, the deontic element in Christian ethics is clear. Besides, it is important to point out that emphasizing the deontic elements in Protestant ethics does not necessarily forbid reference to virtues or values—“*Christian ethics must be concerned about both.*”²¹ On this point, John and Paul Feinberg write: “Taken together, the theory of value and the theory of obligation comprise the whole field of ethics. Some theories of ethics focus more on value than on obligation, though each ethical theory usually addresses both issues at least implicitly. . . .”²² The point is that emphasizing the deontic elements in Christian ethics is not the same as claiming that Christian ethics is fundamentally deontological in nature.

The main question to ask in an effort to understand Thieliicke’s view is: “Why did he think that motive is the essential element in Christian ethics?” Thieliicke presents his motive-based view of Christian ethics in a chapter titled, “The Challenge of Humanism.” This is worth noting because the chapter does not begin with a discussion of ethics, but rather, of interchangeability. This is important because he opens the section titled, “The Interchangeability of Ethics” with the following statement: “The same phenomenon of interchangeability observed in connection with the concept of faith has with the progress of secularism, also come to exist in the field of ethics.”²³ Understanding his notion of “interchangeability” and its relation to faith is crucial to understanding what is driving his claim about the centrality of motive in Protestant Christian ethics.

²¹ J. Philip Wogaman, *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1994), 278.

²² Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 22.

²³ *Ibid.*, 17.

When Thielicke employs the notion of “interchangeability” in reference to faith and then to ethics, the general point that he is making is negative in nature. Due to the process of secularization, faith as well as ethics has been reinterpreted in ways that has resulted in the Christian faith and Christian ethics losing their distinctiveness. According to Thielicke, the Christian faith becomes interchangeable (this is not a positive phenomenon in his view) when it is reinterpreted through the lens of other immanent categories of thought such as psychology. Using psychology as his main example, he writes:

with the help of psychology it is possible to reduce faith to the level of the spiritual processes inside a man. It is characteristic of those who thus view Christian faith as only a subjective, psychological matter that they employ many expressions which receive their stamp from secularization. For example, they typically employ the term ‘credulity’ in order to suggest that faith does not primarily refer to and receive its character from its object, but is simply one of the many products of man’s creative subjectivity.²⁴

When faith becomes nothing more than a “psychical factor” and the objects of faith of “secondary rank,”²⁵ then the Christian faith becomes interchangeable with all other forms of faith (i.e., other major religions, folk religions, New Age spirituality, etc.) for the simple reason that *what* is believed is no longer important. All that remains is the act of believing itself. The focus shifts to the subjective realm of thought and emotion and away from the priority of the objective existence and character of the deity. At this point, the object becomes nothing more than a psychological projection; subjectivity is all that matters. This essentially psychological view of religion that results in the interchangeability of faith is reminiscent of Ludwig Feuerbach’s theory of religion. In a very humanistic turn, Feuerbach believed that the idea of God and related doctrines represent the highest ideal of humanity that we can imagine. He writes: “Thus God, as an object of feeling, or what is the same thing, the feeling of God, is nothing else than man’s highest feeling of self. But God is the freest, or rather the absolutely only free being; thus God is man’s

²⁴ Ibid., 15.

²⁵ Ibid., 16.

highest feeling of freedom. . . . This feeling of freedom is God.”²⁶ Stated differently, God in Feuerbach’s thought is nothing more than “a composite of human predicates” and “synthesis of the human perfections.”²⁷ From this perspective, faith—whatever form it takes—becomes nothing more than a psychological approach to the world that does not (and need not) correspond to any objective reality. This subjective view of the Christian faith is exactly what Thielicke opposes, yet he believes it is unavoidable if the focus is redirected to the act of belief rather than the object of belief. Thielicke writes: “It may thus be seen that Christian existence, to the degree that it is expressed in faith, loses its distinctiveness.”²⁸ If one were to read this last statement out of context, it might be confusing because “expressed in faith” sounds exactly like what Christians ought to be doing.²⁹ However, in this context, the phrase, “expressed in faith” indicates a subjective interpretation of the Christian faith that has been untethered from its “object,” Jesus Christ.³⁰ Christ is dismissed as inconsequential, maybe even as nonexistent. When this interpretive transition has occurred and Christianity is viewed as nothing more than another form that faith takes, it is no longer unique and the narratives, doctrines, traditions, values, virtues, and encouraged acts become accidental in nature since the focus is solely on the act of believing. At this point, all faiths become little more than spiritually-flavored, psychological paradigms through which people navigate a life in which there no longer remains any overarching plan or meaning.

²⁶ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), 284.

²⁷ Van A. Harvey, *Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 25.

²⁸ Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, 16.

²⁹ I am thinking of the verse, “for we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7) and others like it.

³⁰ Regarding the use of the word “object” in connection to Jesus Christ, Thielicke writes in this chapter that Martin Luther “binds faith to the object of faith, to Jesus Christ” (Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, 16–17). Thielicke is presenting Luther’s view as the antithesis to the reduction of the Christian faith to the mere “faith” level that is interchangeable by virtue of ignoring its object.

After Thielicke explains the process by which the Christian faith is psychologized and rendered “co-ordinate and of equal worth”³¹ with all other forms of faith, he turns his attention to how Christian ethics sometimes succumbs to the same fate at the hands of the progress of secularism. He begins by writing:

For any particular deed of “Christian action” is not unequivocal; it is quite interchangeable with acts having completely different motivation. After all, once it has left the inner sphere of motives and become an objectified “work,” even the Christian deed enters into a framework of values which is comprehensible quite apart from considerations of any particularly Christian motive.³²

By “framework of values,” Thielicke has secular theories of morality in mind such as Kant’s deontological ethics and also what he refers to as “Idealistic humanism.”³³ His point is that if you do not consider motive, the distinctness of Christian ethics is lost. In making this point, ignoring motive in the evaluation of acts is analogous to the psychologization of faith: in both cases, all that remains is now too generic to be described as “Christian.” He defends his thesis by arguing the following two points: (1) apart from motive, an act is “ambiguous,” and (2) apart from motive, the act is comprehensible (and even realizable) within secular ethical frameworks. I will take each of these in turn.

When Thielicke writes that an act is ambiguous apart from any reference to motive, he means that we cannot know the true moral nature of the act by observing the act itself.³⁴ He gives the following example: “If someone endows an orphanage, this tells us very little about the real nature of the act. For he could be doing so merely out of a desire for fame or status, especially if he insists that the orphanage be named after himself—in immortal

³¹ Ibid., 16.

³² Ibid., 17.

³³ Ibid., 18.

³⁴ P.H. Nowell-Smith makes a similar point regarding patriotism. After describing a man whose acts seem to convey that he is patriotic, Nowell-Smith writes: “For granted that he acts in these ways, it is still open to us to ask what is his motive for so acting.” He then goes on list three possible motives, and argues that only the third motive in the list would result in the man rightly being called: “truly patriotic.” See P.H. Nowell-Smith, *Ethics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1954), 126.

memory of so noble and unselfish an action.”³⁵ This bears a resemblance to Archer’s *misanthrope* who intended to save a child from drowning but only for selfish reasons (i.e., motives). The point that Thielicke is making is straightforward: you do not know very much about an act until you know the agent’s motive—the reason or reasons for which an agent acts—at the time of action (or immediately preceding it). Consider the act of giving someone a kiss. Countless people use a kiss to communicate *eros*, love, loyalty, faithfulness, friendship, or gratitude to another person. On the other hand, a kiss can mean something entirely different. The Bible states: “While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, ‘The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.’ At once he came up to Jesus and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ and kissed him.”³⁶ Unlike the list of virtuous reasons associated with a kiss that were previously mentioned, this *same* act of giving a kiss, in this particular case, betrays an innocent man. The point is that if someone told you, “Judas has kissed Jesus,” you would still not know much about the act until someone explained Judas’ motive. Upon analysis, this becomes clear. Kissing Jesus was the act. What was Judas’ intent? Judas was trying to bring about the *arrest of Jesus*.³⁷ So what was his motive? Earlier in the chapter, we learn that Judas was interested in self-gain. Prior to the kiss, Judas asks the chief priests: “What will you give me if I betray him to you?”³⁸ In response, he was promised thirty pieces of silver. Judas’ selfish desire for personal gain at the expense of others is also on display six days earlier³⁹:

Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” (He said

³⁵ Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, 23.

³⁶ Matt. 26:47–49.

³⁷ “The one I kiss is the man” (Matt. 26:48).

³⁸ Matt. 26:15.

³⁹ The time period of six days can be confirmed by comparing the following verses: John 12:1 and Matt. 26:17, 20.

this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.)⁴⁰

It is clear that Judas was greedy, and as his question, “What will you give me if I betray him to you?” reveals, Judas gave the kiss of betrayal in order to acquire greater wealth. This was his reason for acting—that is, his motive. This is consistent with the definitions provided in the first section. As I have suggested and will be further explained in the next section using Helmut Thielicke’s motive-based account of Christian ethics, an act—including Judas’ kiss—does not provide sufficient information to determine moral rightness or moral wrongness. In a sense, the act is *amoral* in nature apart from a reference to motive.

Consider the Good Samaritan’s deeds in helping the man that had been beaten, stripped, and left to die on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.⁴¹ The Bible reports: “But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion.”⁴² At first glance, one might wonder what “compassion” has to do with motive. Steven Sverdlik rightly argues that emotions can be intimately connected with motives.⁴³ Recall that Sverdlik defines the motive of an act as: “the ultimate desire of the agent that explains its occurrence, or some feature of it.”⁴⁴ He goes on to write that in some cases, emotions can “give rise to motives” because the emotions can “generate desires to act in ways related to the content of the emotions.”⁴⁵ So while Sverdlik does not identify an emotion with a motive, he does not hesitate to identify the desire that springs forth from the emotion as a motive due to the fact that he ultimately defines motive as a desire. Sverdlik writes: “In specifying a person’s motive we often use simple terms like revenge or fear or greed. But

⁴⁰ John 12:3–6.

⁴¹ Luke 10:30.

⁴² Luke 10:33 (NASB).

⁴³ Richard McCarty makes this same point in relation to Kant’s ethics. He writes that painful feelings can give rise to fear and pleasant feelings can give rise to inclinations (i.e., desires). In the case of both fear and inclination, they can serve as “motivational states.” Essentially, McCarty is making the same point about Kant’s ethics that Sverdlik is making: that emotions can give rise to motives. See Richard McCarty, *Kant’s Theory of Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 175.

⁴⁴ Sverdlik, *Motive and Rightness*, 18.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

such terms are understood to imply the presence of something like a desire. It would be absurd to say that S's motive was greed but that she had no desire for money.”⁴⁶ The bottom line is that the desire stemming from the emotion fulfills the criterion that Sverdlik sets forth for something to be counted a motive: it is something in the psychology of an individual that helps explain an act and make it comprehensible.⁴⁷ In other words, the desire reveals *why* (i.e., provides the reason or reasons) the agent acted in the manner they did.

Returning to the story of the Good Samaritan, compassion is an emotion which moved the Samaritan to act. If we take a bit of liberty with the text, what desires might have motivated the Good Samaritan as a result of feeling compassion for the stranger? Was his reason for acting a desire to show the man that he and his people should not be deemed inferior?⁴⁸ Or maybe the Samaritan was aware that the Jewish priest and Levite had already passed and he wanted to show their hypocrisy by his act of kindness. It could be the case that his motive for acting was the simple, straightforward desire to communicate the love of God to the helpless victim. On the other hand, imagine if there was no reference to compassion in this story. If the story had only provided a catalogue of acts performed by the Good Samaritan, then we could only speculate as to the *reason* (i.e., the motive) why he helped the stranger.⁴⁹ Maybe the Good Samaritan helped because although he cared nothing for anyone, he hoped to gain fame and popularity among the Jewish

⁴⁶ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁸ The Samaritans were viewed as inferior to Jews because they were not full-blooded Jews. A Samaritan was half-Jew, half Assyrian. This mixed race resulted from the intermarrying that happened between Jews and Assyrians after Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel around 722 BCE. For this reason, the Samaritan could have relished the opportunity to show another person that there is no reason to condemn either him or the people of his race.

⁴⁹ Nardo and Francis write: “The Good Samaritan is lauded for his action; we do not know his intent.” See Massimo N. Nardo and Ronald D. Francis, “Morality and the Prevention of Corruption: Action or Intent—a New Look at an Old Problem,” *Journal of Financial Crime* 19, no. 2 (2012): 130. However, I wonder if they, like Mark Jackson, are treating intention and motive as synonymous. I say this because surely we do know the Good Samaritan’s intent: to rescue the man on the side of the road and prevent his death. It seems more accurate to say that we do not know his motive, that is, the reason or reasons why he rescued the victim. That being said, if motive is closer to what Nardo and Francis mean, then I disagree once more because a range of motives is implied as I explained earlier due to the mention of “compassion.”

community, which held a derogatory view of him and his people. Whatever the case, the point is that without reference to the emotion of compassion and whichever motive-related desire that followed, the moral character of the act is ambiguous. Based on Sverdlik's argument that emotionally-based desires often explain why someone performs a certain act, it is safe to say that the reference to compassion in this story narrows the field of potential motives from which the Good Samaritan could have acted. This example provides further support for Thielicke's argument that we must look to the motive that lies "behind" the act (i.e., whatever form it may take) if we want to discover the real nature of the act. Only when you know the motive or motives behind the act do you know whether the act is meritorious. This implies that motive is part of the "Christian character of an action."⁵⁰ Without any reference to motive, the ambiguous nature of the act results in Christian ethics being *interchangeable* with any other framework of values. More will be said about this later in the section, but I now want to discuss the second reason that Thielicke believes that motive is the essential element in Christian ethics.

The second reason that motive is essential to Protestant ethics is that apart from motive, any act that one might want to label as "Christian" remains comprehensible (and even realizable) within secular ethical frameworks. Thielicke asks: "Cannot the goals of Christian action (service to one's neighbor, establishment of community, unselfishness, obedience, etc.) be as well achieved—or at least sought—'without Christ,' simply within the framework of secular ideologies?"⁵¹ Stated differently, if the moral value of a particular act can be understood, explained, and accommodated by any number of normative theories, then why bother trying to account for the act within Christian ethics when this only complicates matters? Occam's razor would advise otherwise. Returning to Thielicke's example of the person (henceforth, I will refer to him as "John") who makes a significant donation to an orphanage, this act can be understood and encouraged within various systems of ethics. For example, Mill's utilitarianism suggests that the right act

⁵⁰ Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, 23.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

is that which produces the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. John's substantial donation to the orphanage will undoubtedly satisfy this Greatest Happiness Principle. If John had kept the money for himself, then he would have been happy. However, by donating the money to the orphanage, several children as well as workers will benefit and thereby experience greater happiness. The right course of action is clear: donate the money. Besides, John may also benefit emotionally from the act, feeling as though he used his money for a good purpose or that he is not selfish after all. Assuming that this is the case, John also will experience increased happiness along with the workers and children, which serves to further increase the total sum of happiness. From the perspective of Mill's utilitarianism, the motive does not matter; only the consequences do. Another way of making this same point is to say that utilitarianism is future-oriented, that is, "only future consequences are material to present decisions."⁵² Sverdlik writes: "the motive of an action, as such, is one of the causes of it and thus belongs to the history of the world preceding the action. A completely 'forward-looking' theory of rightness like consequentialism cannot allow that an antecedent of an action affect its rightness."⁵³ Because a motive is prior to an action, it is dismissed as irrelevant to the classification of an act because it has nothing to do with the consequences. For this reason, motive is not central to a utilitarian classification of an act. Returning to the orphanage example, why would the workers or orphans care about John's motives? Motives do not feed children; acts do. The overall point is that the value of the act of donating the money to the orphanage can be comprehended not only in a Christian framework of values but also in a secular one (in this case, utilitarianism), so long as motives are ignored.

Does the same hold true if we evaluate this same act from within Kant's ethics? The answer is a clear "yes" if we once again ignore motive. Granted,

⁵² John Rawls, "Two Concepts of Rules," *The Philosophical Review* 64, no. 1 (Jan. 1955): 5. For further support of this future-oriented type of objection to motives having deontic relevance in Utilitarianism, see Mark Timmons, *Significance and System: Essays on Kant's Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 173.

⁵³ Sverdlik, *Motive and Rightness*, 9.

this example is more nuanced than the previous example because Kant does require proper motive. However, although he requires motive, it is not the same as the type of motive that is required in Christian ethics. I will say more on this soon. For Kant, it is not enough to perform the act that the categorical imperative requires;⁵⁴ rather, it must be performed in the right manner. One must not only perform the act, but one must do it “from duty,” not merely “in conformity with duty.”⁵⁵ Essentially, this is a reference to motive. Kant thinks that if the reason (i.e., motive) that someone performs a deed is because it is their duty to do it, then the act possesses moral worth. However, if a person does that act because they are inclined to do it or because instinct prompts them, then no matter the act, it does not possess moral value. This is not to say that the act is morally wrong, but only that it does not possess moral value, because the will is not motivated *from duty*.

Concerning this aspect of Kant’s ethics, Thielicke notes: “It is indeed a proof of the moral worth of an action when that action involves struggle and is wrung out of me despite my natural inclination to do the opposite.”⁵⁶ In a similar tone, C.S. Lewis echoes Thielicke’s point when he contends that Kant has been accused of a “‘morbid frame of mind’ which measures the value of an act by its unpleasantness.”⁵⁷ Of course, Lewis was not a Kantian. However, his assessment that for Kant, an act only possesses moral value if it is performed “out of pure reverence for the moral law, that is, without inclination . . .”, seems accurate.⁵⁸ Acting from a motive of duty is essential to performing a deed that possesses moral worth in Kant’s deontological system of ethics, and this

⁵⁴ Kant’s first formulation of the categorical imperative is: “act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.” See Kant, *Groundwork*, 33.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁶ Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, 33; cf. Allen W. Wood, *The Free Development of Each: Studies on Freedom, Right, and Ethics in Classical German Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 16.

⁵⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, in *The C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York: HarperOne, 2017): 608.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 608; Similar to Lewis, David Daniel writes of an act performed from duty that it “excludes inclination.” See David M. Daniel, *Briefly: Kant’s Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (London: SCM Press, 2006): 43; See also Badhwar, “Justice and Supererogation, 125.

motive is on display in its purest form when all inclinations and instincts are absent.⁵⁹ As Christine Korsgaard writes: “When such a person does his duty, not otherwise wanting to, we know that the thought of duty alone has been sufficient to produce the action.⁶⁰ The bottom line is that for Kant, motive is everything. It determines whether an act possesses moral value or not. This focus on motive, an element in one’s psychology which is related to character, is most likely why Thielicke refers to Kant’s ethics as an “ethics of disposition.”⁶¹

So is Thielicke’s example of a person donating money to the orphanage comprehensible in Kant’s system? As was the case with utilitarianism, the answer is clearly “yes.” The main requirement is that one gives *from* duty and not merely *in conformity with* duty. If someone makes the donation while thinking, “I am doing this because it is my moral duty to help those in need when I am able,” then they have acted primarily out of a sense of duty. Could we will that this principle of action become a universal law, that every person in the world would act on the maxim, “When someone is in need and has the means to help, then it is their moral duty to act.” Again, the answer is “yes.” Kant described this duty in the following terms: “To be beneficent where one can . . .”⁶² However, Kant quickly notes that performing this act from the motive of duty requires that the donor not act from any other motive, whether it be negative (e.g., vanity, self-interest) or positive (e.g., to experience the pleasure of spreading joy to others).⁶³ Granted, Kant would not have an issue with someone experiencing pleasure or a deep sense of self-satisfaction because

⁵⁹ See Allen W. Wood, *Kantian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 29.

⁶⁰ Christine M. Korsgaard, forward to *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), xv.

⁶¹ Referring to Kant’s ethics as an “ethics of disposition” is surprising for the simple fact that Kant’s ethics might be considered the deontological ethic par excellence. Yet, the word “disposition” suggests a closer affiliation with the family of terms and concepts associated with virtue ethics (e.g., character, virtue, vice, etc.) than it does an ethic of obligation. However, I believe that Thielicke is right to use this label because of the central role that motives play in Kant’s system.

⁶² Kant, *Groundwork*, 13.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 13.

he does not view them as intrinsically wrong.⁶⁴ His only stipulation is that these positive feelings not be the main reason for which someone acts. One is to do their duty *from* duty (i.e., because it is their duty), and if positive feelings happen to accompany such acts, so be it. They are to be nothing more than the spontaneous by-products of an act performed out of a sense of duty. In this sense, they are accidental in nature and ought never be the reason that a person performs an act if they desire that the doing of the act be considered moral in nature.

To avoid getting too sidetracked, let it suffice to say that this beneficent act is “comprehensible quite apart from considerations of any particularly Christian motive.”⁶⁵ Although Kant does require that the moral agent act with a right motive (i.e., a sense of duty) in order for their act to be considered moral, this is not what Thielicke has in mind when he writes of “Christian motivation.” More will be said later in this section, but let it suffice for now to say that in Thielicke’s view, doing an act “as to the Lord” and not “unto men” constitutes proper motive.⁶⁶ Most likely, Thielicke would rightly view Kant’s “from a sense of duty” motive as an impoverished criterion in comparison with the Christian motive of doing an act to please and honor the Lord. This is not to imply that these two motives are antithetical: one could perform an act out of a sense of duty in an effort to please and honor the Lord. However, this does not mean that all acts done out of a sense of duty are done to please and honor the Lord. While both Kant and Thielicke agree that motive is crucial in determining the moral classification of an act, they disagree on the required nature of the motive. In this instance, the quality of the motive must be assessed, and if it is not, then John’s donation to the orphanage is indistinguishable between both Kant’s and Thielicke’s account. Yet, if the quality of the motive is considered, then one will have no problem distinguishing John’s act in Thielicke’s account from the same act in Kant’s

⁶⁴ Mark Packer, “Kant on Desire and Moral Pleasure,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50, no. 3 (1989): 435; Richard McCarty, *Kant’s Theory of Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 175, 178–179.

⁶⁵ Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, 17.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

account because of the two different types of motive. Reiterating Thielicke's point, there can be nothing "Christian" about the act unless the level of motive is consulted.

The previous discussion of the donor's act within both utilitarianism and Kant's deontology is sufficient to demonstrate that when motive is ignored, most normative theories can easily account for any act that would be encouraged within a Christian framework of values. At this point, the Christian narrative and framework of values become superfluous. However, this is not the case if motive is given preeminence as Thielicke suggests. Having discussed the two reasons that Thielicke offers in defense of the essential role that motive must play in Christian ethics in order to preserve its distinctiveness, I now want to take a deeper look into Thielicke's account of motive. For transparency, it is important to begin with the fact that Thielicke does not distinguish between motive and intent. As with moral philosophers such as M.W. Jackson, the failure to draw such a line can result in confusion.⁶⁷ Although there are moments when Thielicke describes motive in a way that might better resemble an intention, based on our earlier definition, his overall use of the term is consistent with the definition of motive provided earlier: "the reason or reasons for which an agent acts."

Thielicke uses clear, strong language concerning the importance and place of motive in Christian ethics. Not only does he describe motive as the "specifically 'Christian' element in ethics," but he also uses other language to communicate its importance. On one occasion, he describes proper motive as a "divine requirement,"⁶⁸ and in another place, he employs more discipleship-oriented language: "that which is distinctive about obedience to God."⁶⁹ His point seems clear: *Obedience to God requires proper motive, and without*

⁶⁷ See Jackson, "The Nature of Supererogation," 294.

⁶⁸ Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, 20. Walter Wilson also notes that motive is a major focus in Jesus' teaching on the following three practices in Matt. 6: giving alms, prayer, and fasting. He begins by noting that there are two ways that this passage is interpreted. In the second of two interpretative options, he writes that a "contrast between proper and improper motivations for practicing one's piety occurs in all three" (Walter T. Wilson, "Seen in Secret: Inconspicuous Piety and Alternative Subjectivity in Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72, no. 3 (July 2010): 477).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

proper motive, one cannot fulfill their God-given duties. One must do the right deed (or avoid the wrong one) in the right way, which for Thielicke means having the right motive. Grudem makes a similar point, writing: “Jesus taught us to beware of doing good actions with wrong motives, such as the desire to be praised by other people.”⁷⁰ Grudem then mentions Matthew 6:1–2 in support of his claim: “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people *in order to be seen by them*, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.”⁷¹ With the use of italics, Grudem uses Jesus’ words to show that giving alms from a selfish motive is forbidden by Jesus. Concerning motive, Jesus makes similar points later in Matthew 6 in his teaching on prayer⁷² as well as fasting.⁷³ It seems that Jesus would rather someone not give, pray, or fast if their ultimate motivation is to perform these acts for “mere outward show.”⁷⁴ Grudem is making the point, like Thielicke, that proper motive is crucial to obeying God. It is not just the outward act that matters. The act must be “genuine,” a property that comprises, in part, the “basis of Christian action.”⁷⁵ This property is characterized by a harmony between the inner realm of motive and the outward realm of acts.⁷⁶ Presumably, *genuineness* is to be understood as the opposite of hypocrisy for which Jesus so often maligned the religious leaders of his day.⁷⁷ In support of the importance of genuineness, Thielicke mentions Matthew 23:25, where Jesus rebukes the Pharisees in the following manner: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-

⁷⁰ Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 150.

⁷¹ Wayne Grudem uses the ESV for these two verses.

⁷² Matt. 6:5–6.

⁷³ Matt. 6:16–18.

⁷⁴ Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, 21.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁷⁷ For several examples of Jesus rebuking the Pharisees for hypocrisy, see Matt. 23. Although there are several examples scattered throughout the four Gospels, Matt. 23 records six examples.

indulgence.” The point is that for Jesus, a lack of harmony between the inward (i.e., motive) and outward (i.e., the act) can result in disobedience because though the obligatory act be performed, the “inner structure of the action”⁷⁸ remains un-Christian due to motive (and thus, out of harmony with the objective act).

This view that Thielicke sets forth (which is very similar to Grudem’s treatment of motive in Protestant ethics) is made clearer with a distinction by George Hughes. Hughes distinguishes between an “act duty” and a “total obligation.” Whereas the former is subsumed into the latter, the reverse is not at all true. Hughes writes:

When I ask myself, “What is my duty?” or “What ought I to do?” what I may be doing is this: I may be surveying the various acts which . . . are open to me, and from these trying to select one as *the right act* in the situation. In order to do this I may have to take into account a great many factors . . . but the essential point here is that on the basis of my answers to these questions I am trying to select an *act* out of those which I am surveying. Clearly then, if this is what I am doing, the question, “What is my duty?” is here a question about the nature of acts and their relations to the situation in which I find myself; it is in fact, the question, “What is the right *act*?” And if I do the act which is in fact the right one in the situation, then clearly in this sense I have done my duty (objectively). . . . But all these questions are questions about acts alone. I propose to employ the term “act-duty” to refer to this usage. My act-duty in a given situation will be that *act* which it is my duty to do.⁷⁹

Assessing whether a person, particularly a Christian, has performed their duty would mean that neither intent nor motive is considered. For many moral philosophers and Christian thinkers, this cannot be tolerated. David Cunningham is quick to point out that part of what Jesus’ teaching reveals is that it is wrong for people to “mistake their observation of the letter of the law for truly good moral behavior.”⁸⁰ In other words, an act-duty approach is insufficient. If Jesus would prefer people not pray than pray for mere outward show, it appears that he is teaching that *motive* is a key element in the inner

⁷⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁷⁹ George Hughes, “Motive and Duty,” *Mind* 53, no. 212 (Oct. 1944): 325.

⁸⁰ David Cunningham, *Christian Ethics: The End of the Law* (London: Routledge, 2008), 12.

structure of the act. If motives do not possess deontic relevance, it seems that Jesus would prefer people to perform acts regardless of motive. However, this does not appear to be the case. So whether we are discussing Mill's, Heyd's, or Archer's preferences for intent or Grenz's, Grudem's, Kant's, or Thieliicke's preferences for motive, most thinkers seem to reject an act-duty conception of duty. Hughes agrees that the act-duty conception of duty is deficient. After presenting the act-duty view, he proceeds to offer a more complete and robust conception of duty, which he calls "total obligation." He writes:

But from the fact that there is this established use of the term "duty" it clearly does not follow that my "total obligation" (i.e. the complete discharge, within the limits of my powers, of everything—whether mere acts, or something more—which the situation requires of me) consists in nothing but the doing of my act duty. . . . I might have other moral obligations in addition to the obligation to perform it. The term "duty" is commonly used to refer to this notion of total obligation; but neglect to draw the distinction between these two notions has led to many confusions.⁸¹

Having drawn this distinction, Hughes goes on to attack W.D. Ross' view of ethics as essentially act-duty in nature. He then makes the important point that while an act-duty view of moral obligation precludes any reference to motive, a total obligation perspective "may include acting from a certain motive."⁸² Considering the Matthean passages that Thieliicke and Grudem use to defend the centrality of motive, Hughes' point that confusion results from a failure to distinguish between "act-duty" and "total obligation" is relevant. In Jesus' polemic against the Pharisees, it seems evident that this is exactly what he was rebuking them for. From the perspective of "act-duty," they were outstanding in their performance. However, Jesus was not content with mere external compliance. On one occasion, he expressed disapproval of several of the Jewish religious leaders, saying: "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.'"⁸³ Something more was required than the mere act.

⁸¹ Hughes, "Motive and Duty," 325.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 327.

⁸³ Mark 7:6; see also Matt. 15:8.

Using Hughes' language, the "act-duty" conception of duty was not representative of the "total obligation" that God requires as revealed in Jesus' scathing rebuke of the Pharisees. Proper motive is essential if a Christian desires to fulfill their duty in the second sense (i.e., total obligation). According to Hughes, total obligation is a fuller, more complete notion of duty, and I am arguing that it should be preferred in Protestant ethics. Considering the fact that Thieliicke believes an act is ambiguous without reference to motive, his view of duty easily fits Hughes' notion of "total obligation" rather than mere act-duty.

Earlier it was mentioned that according to Thieliicke, the "base" of a Christian act is the quality, or property, of genuineness. For Thieliicke, this "base" is only half of what comprises something much broader, that is, the "fundamental imperative of Christian conduct." He writes: "Hence the specifically 'Christian' element in ethics is found only at the level of motives. This is pointedly expressed in the saying in Colossians 3:23: 'Whatever ye do, do it from the heart (ἐκ ψυχῆς), as to the Lord, and not unto men.'"⁸⁴ As alluded to earlier, the "base" of the act concerns the genuineness of the act, that is, whether a person acts "from the heart." Thieliicke equates acting "from the heart" with not acting from a "motive of mere outward show."⁸⁵ What makes an act genuine, therefore, is that the act does not appear to be one thing but is actually something else at the level of motive. Below is a good example of the inner-outer harmony that is indicative of genuineness:

Consider a couple who are talking together about whether they should agree to help with their church's youth ministry one night a week. If they honestly ask themselves why they want to do this, they might find that their motives are very positive ones, such as a desire to minister effectively to young people who come to their church, to be involved in a church activity in which their children participate, to do some kind of ministry together, to meet a need because of a shortage of volunteers at the time, or because of other similar motives. They might just want to honor God in the way they conduct their lives and to advance his kingdom.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Thieliicke, *Theological Ethics*, 21.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸⁶ Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 151.

This is an example of inner and outer harmony because the potential motives match the act being considered. All I mean is that the act of volunteering seems to communicate that one loves God, wants to honor God, and wants to help others. In the above scenario, the potential motives are to this effect. Thus, the person can be said to be “fully present in his action.”⁸⁷ On the other hand, they could be considering volunteering from un-Christian motives. Consider the revised scenario below:

They might be thinking about helping in the youth ministry because a neighbor has been putting pressure on them to do so and they are tired of telling him no, even though they do not feel it is the right thing for them to do. Or they might want to become better known and gain recognition from others in the church, which is a simple appeal to their pride. Or they might be seeking an opportunity to observe the youth pastor so they can lodge more criticisms against him with the church leaders!⁸⁸

In this revised scenario, there is a lack of inner-outer harmony. As before, the act of volunteering communicates that one loves God, wants to honor God, and wants to help others. However, the couple are not volunteering for any of these reasons, even though the outward act might suggest otherwise. The point is that the potential motives do not correspond with the act itself; disharmony exists. Therefore, the act is not genuine and each person is not fully present in their act.

Besides the “base” of the act, Thieliicke writes that we must also consider the “goal” because it comprises the other half of the fundamental imperative of Christian conduct. Whereas the “base” was captured in the phrase, “from the heart” in Colossians 3:23, the “goal” of the act is expressed in the words, “as to the Lord, and not unto men.”⁸⁹ In other words, a Christian’s reason for acting (i.e., motive)—whether it be giving, praying, fasting, or some other behavior—should never be to impress, flatter, or gain the approval of people (i.e., “unto men”) rather than the Lord. With this in mind, it seems that Thieliicke’s notion of “goal” represents the reason for which one acts, and

⁸⁷ Thieliicke, *Theological Ethics*, 21.

⁸⁸ Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 151.

⁸⁹ Thieliicke, *Theological Ethics*, 21.

therefore, can be replaced with “motive.” Essentially, the goal of an act for a Christian is to do the act from the following motive: “to the glory of the Lord, the *kurios*.”⁹⁰ Though the “base” has more to do with a Christian being present in the act and the goal more to do with the Lord being present in the act, both are ultimately to be determined by the *kurios* if the act is to be called “Christian.”⁹¹ Ultimately, the fundamental imperative of Christian conduct according to Thielicke is to act with the motive of bringing glory to the Lord (i.e., goal), and by doing so, both the act that appears to be for the Lord and the motive will be in harmony (i.e., base).

Further support for my claim that Thielicke is using the word “motive” in the same way that I am is found in his treatment of Luther. Thielicke refers to Luther’s use of the phrase, “We should fear and love God” which Luther placed at the beginning of each of the ten commandments in the book, *Small Catechism*, which was written for pastors and preachers with whom he was in contact. For example, regarding the commandment about adultery,⁹² Luther writes: “‘You shall not commit adultery.’ What does this mean? Answer: We should fear God and love God, and so we should lead a chaste and pure life in word and deed, each one loving and honoring his wife or her husband.”⁹³ This is extremely important because Luther’s beginning phrase, which is not explicitly mentioned in the Decalogue in Exodus 20, suggests to Thielicke that Luther also did not interpret the commands in an act-duty manner. Thielicke interprets the addition of the phrase, “We should fear God and love God,” as confirmation that Luther also believed that “obedience to the commandments is rendered on the level of motives.”⁹⁴ Thielicke continues: “All right action springs from the fact that I fear and love God. And any action which does not spring from this fact is to be disparaged either as an attempt to earn salvation by merit or as hypocrisy.”⁹⁵ For Thielicke, doing an act because one fears and

⁹⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁹¹ Ibid., 22.

⁹² Exod. 20:14.

⁹³ Martin Luther, *Small Catechism*, in *The Book of Concord*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1959), 343.

⁹⁴ Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, 22.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 22.

loves God is to obey God with proper “Christian motivation.” When this is the case, both the “base” and the goal of the act are being determined by the *kurios*, which means that the motive is proper and that the “inner structure of the action is ‘Christian.’”⁹⁶

Considering this same point from another angle, fearing and loving the Lord seems to refer more to why someone would perform a particular behavior rather than to a specific state of affairs that the person is trying to bring about. For example, if someone asks: “What state of affairs is the agent aiming to bring about by acting?” someone would not say, “Because I fear and love the Lord.” This would not make sense. But if someone were to ask: “*Why* does the agent want to achieve this particular outcome?” then it would be appropriate to respond with: “Because I fear and love the Lord.” In other words, fearing and loving the Lord helps explain why someone performs X, which in essence gives us their reasons. And as defined earlier, motive—not intent—is concerned with “the reason or reasons for which an agent acts.”

Though I have just argued that Thielicke’s combined use of the words “goal” and “base” are similar to how I am using the word “motive,” it would be amiss to not acknowledge some ambiguity in Thielicke’s writing, especially in relation to my argument in this chapter. Like M.W. Jackson and others, Thielicke does not draw a distinction between motive and intent. He speaks only of motive, and some might think that the word “goal” resembles something close to intent. However, as previously argued, the word “goal” is clearly associated with doing an act to please God, not people. Thus, one need not pay so much attention to the specific word that Thielicke uses (i.e., “goal”) as opposed to how he uses the term. My point is that though there is some ambiguity in Thielicke’s writing, his argument can safely be viewed as an argument for motive, not intent, as the essential element in Protestant ethics. As a result, his work remains crucial to my view that proper motive is a necessary criterion in a Protestant account of supererogation.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

Although my main focus in this section has been to argue for the centrality of motive rather than intent in a Protestant account of supererogation, I have focused primarily on the role of motive in duty. One reason for this is that there is a multitude of duties listed in the New Testament, which provides ample opportunity to investigate the more general deontic role that motive plays in classifying acts in Protestant Christianity. As stated earlier, my reasoning is as follows: *If acting with proper motive is required in order to obey God when doing what he has commanded, then it stands to reason that acting with the proper motive is also an essential element in the performance of an act that is supererogatory.* It would be odd from a Protestant perspective if motive were an essential element in performing a duty while not being an essential element in performing an act of supererogation. For this reason, I interpret Thielicke's argument for motive as the essential element in Protestant ethics in a broad manner to encompass both duties and acts of supererogation.

Before addressing a significant objection to my motive-argument presented by Mill in the next section, I want to clarify my use of the terms "proper" and "improper" in reference to motive. Whether writing of motive in relation to obligatory or supererogatory acts, proper motive is any motive that is ultimately Christ-centered and Christ-honoring as opposed to one that is selfish, fearful, vengeful, greedy, lustful, prideful, or any other that is contrary to the nature and teachings of Jesus Christ. Upon initial consideration, the requirement that motives be Christ-centered and Christ-honoring might seem quite narrow, too strict a criterion, or too vague. However, I do not believe that this is the case. In a section titled, "Motives for Obedience to God in the Christian Life," Grudem provides eleven examples of what proper motivation might look like from a Christian perspective. They are as follows (though I have omitted the specific Bible verses that he gives in support of each):

- (1) a desire to please God and express our love to him . . .
- (2) the need to keep a clear conscience before God . . .
- (3) the desire to be a "vessel for noble use" and have increased effectiveness in the work of the kingdom . . .
- (4) the desire to see unbelievers come to Christ through observing our lives . . .
- (5) the desire to receive present blessings from

God on our lives and ministries . . . (6) the desire to avoid God's displeasure and discipline on our lives (sometimes called "the fear of God") . . . (7) the desire to seek greater heavenly reward . . . (8) the desire for a deeper walk with God . . . (9) the desire that angels would glorify God for our obedience . . . (10) the desire for peace . . . and joy in our lives . . . (11) the desire to do what God commands, simply because his commands are right, and we delight in doing what is right.
. . .⁹⁷

This list is valuable because it helps us imagine real motives that do not seem generic in nature. Most people can probably identify with one or more of these, whereas the terms "Christ-centered" and "Christ-honoring" might seem too generic. In section four, this list will be helpful in evaluating the act of supererogation presented in chapter three in light of the present chapter's emphasis upon motive as a required criterion of supererogation in Protestant ethics. Before doing so, I want to address Heyd's and Archer's significant objection to a motive-based account of supererogation (and presumably, any act in question) that is based on John Stuart Mill's comments in chapter two of *Utilitarianism*.

Response to David Heyd's and Alfred Archer's Intent-based Theory

As is obvious by now, David Heyd is a very important figure in the literature on supererogation. His book, published in 1982, preceded Alfred Archer's work on supererogation by approximately three decades. Both offer an intent-based account of supererogation although their views regarding the nature of intent differ significantly.⁹⁸ In this section, my goal is to show that there are good reasons for questioning Heyd's and Archer's argument for intent rather than motive. However, this task is not as straightforward as it seems. Heyd's position is clearly rooted in John Stuart Mill's argument for intent over motive in his book, *Utilitarianism*. Thus, Mill must be engaged on

⁹⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 757–758.

⁹⁸ As discussed in chapter one, Heyd believes that the intent of the agent must be altruistic in nature, whereas Archer believes that this is too demanding and is therefore too restrictive. Instead, he argues that the intent must only be moral because there are deeds that though not altruistic, are still supererogatory.

some level in order to respond effectively to Heyd. In order to accomplish this goal, I will do the following in this section: (1) Present and argue against Heyd's and Archer's view in conjunction with Mill, and (2) show that there are certain scenarios where motives clearly have deontic relevance for a particular act both in moral philosophy and the New Testament. Assuming that I am successful, this will provide additional support for my view that motives have deontic relevance in a Protestant account of supererogation.

In his book, *Supererogation*, Heyd provides a quadripartite definition of supererogation. The third part of the definition reads: "[An act of supererogation] is morally good, both by virtue of its (intended) consequences and by virtue of its intrinsic value (being beyond duty)."⁹⁹ The importance of the first parenthesis cannot be overstated. In choosing to make intention a criterion of supererogation, he is rejecting the following two views: (1) an objective account of supererogation that decides the status of an act without any reference to the inner, psychological world of the agent, and more specifically, (2) a motive-based account of supererogation. Later in the same chapter where Heyd provides his definition, he explains why intent should be a criterion of supererogation. He writes:

Altruistic intention should not, however, be confused with altruistic motive. While intention forms part of the description of the act, the motive is only the "feeling" which moves us to do it (Mill, 1969a, pp. 219-20n). The motives for acting supererogatorily are diverse in character, and are not always virtuous. One may act heroically in order to gain fame, to soothe one's conscience (haunted by guilt feelings), or out of moral self-indulgence. High-minded motives are not a necessary condition for supererogatory action as so many theorists tend to believe (e.g. Peterfreund, 1978, p. 55). Although the motives of supererogatory acts may be self-regarding, the *intention* must be other-regarding.¹⁰⁰

The key phrase in Heyd's account of how acts (in this case, supererogatory acts) are to be individuated is "intention forms part of the description of the act . . ." The corollary is that motives do not. Heyd's intent-based theory of act

⁹⁹ Heyd, *Supererogation*, 115.

¹⁰⁰ Heyd, *Supererogation*, 137.

classification is derived from John Stuart Mill's view of intentions. In a famous footnote found in chapter two of *Utilitarianism*, Mill writes:

I submit that he who saves another from drowning in order to kill him by torture afterwards does not differ only in motive from him who does the same thing from duty or benevolence; the act itself is different. The rescue of the man is, in the case supposed, only the necessary first step of an act far more atrocious than leaving him to drown would have been. Had Mr. Davies said, "The rightness or wrongness of saving a man from drowning does depend very much"—not upon the motive, but—"upon the intention," no utilitarian would have differed from him. Mr. Davies, by an oversight too common not to be quite venial, has in this case confounded the very different ideas of Motive and Intention. . . . The morality of the action depends entirely upon the intention—that is, upon what the agent wills to do. But the motive, that is, the feeling which makes him will so to do, if it makes no difference in the act, makes none in the morality: though it makes a great difference in our moral estimation of the agent.¹⁰¹

Referencing Heyd's remarks as well as Mill's well-known footnote, Archer offers the following summary of Heyd's intention-based view: "An agent in the same situation but acting with different intentions would have performed a different act. As a result, the motivation that led to the act does not alter the moral evaluation of the act; it only alters our evaluation of the agent."¹⁰² The line of thought seems to be that because it is "possible for different motives to lead to the same action,"¹⁰³ whereas this is not true for intent, intentions must be intrinsic to acts, unlike motives. In other words, if a person can perform act A from either motive X or Y but can only perform act A from intent S, then it appears that only intent S is intrinsic to act A and is therefore a necessary constituent of the act. On the other hand, no particular motive is associated with act A, so from a deontic perspective, it is superfluous. This is not to say that motive is completely irrelevant, but that any influence it might have will be indirect at most.

Before going any further, two points need to be made. First, interpreting Mill's comments in a footnote in chapter two of *Utilitarianism* is not as

¹⁰¹ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 26.

¹⁰² Archer, "Supererogation and Intentions," 451.

¹⁰³ Jonathan Dancy, "Mill's Puzzling Footnote," *Utilitas* 12, no. 2 (2000): 222.

straightforward as it might appear, which other philosophers have noted.¹⁰⁴ Secondly, Heyd and Archer do not address the complexity of Mill's footnote, even though this is clearly the text that they use for support of their intent-based view of supererogation. They stay with a very basic, straightforward interpretation of Mill's intent-based account of act evaluation: *intents are relevant, motives are not*. This is not necessarily bad, but it is worth mentioning to make the point that an in-depth analysis of Mill's theory of act-evaluation is not necessarily required in order to effectively respond to Heyd and Archer. Therefore, though it is important to present and engage Mill's view, I plan to focus only on the aspects of his theory that are relevant to Heyd's and Archer's arguments for intent over motive.

Mill devotes chapter two in *Utilitarianism* to expounding the theory of utilitarianism, which is the best-known version of consequentialist ethics. This is important because his overall normative theory plays an important role in his intent-based account of act classification. It is also in chapter two that Mill makes a clear distinction between motives and intentions and then proceeds to argue that the "morality of the action depends entirely on the intention," not the motive.¹⁰⁵ Liezl van Zyl describes this view as "anti-motivism." This is the view that motive is not relevant in the evaluation of actions although it is useful when assessing the character of agents.¹⁰⁶ For Zyl, Mill's intent-based theory of classifying acts is a paradigmatic example.¹⁰⁷ Contrary to anti-motivism, Sverdlik defends the "Motives Matter" thesis, which states: "There is an action X such that if X were performed from one motive it would fall into one deontic category and if X were performed from another motive it would fall into a second deontic category in virtue of this difference in motives."¹⁰⁸ If this can be demonstrated, then the example would be sufficient to defeat anti-motivism. Zyl proceeds to describe three different forms that *Motives Matter* can take:

¹⁰⁴ Dancy, "Mill's Puzzling Footnote," 220; Michael Ridge, "Mill's Intentions and Motives," *Utilitas* 14, no. 1 (2002): 54, 58; Christoph Schmidt-Petri, "Mill and the Footnote on Davies," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 47 (2013): 339.

¹⁰⁵ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 26.

¹⁰⁶ Liezl van Zyl, "Motive and Right Action," *Philosophia* 38 (2010): 406.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 405.

¹⁰⁸ Sverdlik, *Motive and Rightness*, 4.

weak-motivism, partial-motivism, and strong-motivism. Weak-motivism is the view that “a change in motive alone is sometimes sufficient to move an act from one deontic category into another.”¹⁰⁹ Strong-motivism is the view that “a good motive always serves to make an act right, whereas a bad (or insufficiently good) motive always makes it wrong.”¹¹⁰ And partial-motivism is the view that “a good motive is necessary but not sufficient for right action.”¹¹¹ While all three are distinct from one another, they all represent an antithesis to Mill’s anti-motivist position.

According to Mill, at no point is motive relevant to classifying acts. In one example, he writes: “He who saves a fellow creature from drowning does what is morally right, whether his motive be duty or the hope of being paid for his trouble.”¹¹² Christoph Schmidt-Petri refers to the former motive as “benign” and the latter as “selfish.”¹¹³ One can see why this is an attractive example for Mill to use. After all, no one would excuse another person for refusing to rescue a drowning person because they feared acting from a wrong motive. No matter the motive, it seems that the right thing to do is to save the drowning person. Archer makes the same point when he writes that if someone pays their taxes intentionally, they have fulfilled their obligation, whether they did so out of a sense of duty or because they feared punishment. Situations like the two just mentioned suggest that Mill may be right. However, he writes that the Rev. J. Llewellyn Davies provided him with the following objection which Schmidt-Petri names the “tyrant” case:

Surely the rightness or wrongness of saving a man from drowning does depend very much upon the motive with which it is done. Suppose that a tyrant, when his enemy jumped into the sea to escape from him, saved him from drowning simply in order that he might inflict upon him more exquisite tortures, would it tend to clearness to speak of that rescue as “a morally right action?”¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Zly, 407.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 407.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 407.

¹¹² Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 18.

¹¹³ Christoph Schmidt-Petri, “Mill and the Footnote on Davies,” *Journal of Value Inquiry* 47 (2013): 343.

¹¹⁴ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 26.

By this last rhetorical question, Davies clearly does not think that saving the individual with this motive is a morally right action. One might object: But surely letting someone drown when you could have saved them cannot be a morally right act? Yet Schmidt-Petri points out that unlike the benign and selfish cases, the tyrant case does not result in a “net-benefit” for the person rescued because of the simple fact that the “victim may well have preferred to drown rather than to first get ‘rescued’ and then tortured and killed somewhat later.”¹¹⁵ From Davies’ perspective, it is unthinkable that a person could fulfill their duty while acting from such a despicable motive. Yet this is exactly what Mill seems to argue and both Heyd and Archer follow his lead. Mill accuses Davies of confusing motive with intention, and suggests that as a result, Davies is wrong to assert that the rescuer’s motive is responsible for determining the deontic status of the act. However, Mill’s remarks are far from clear and various philosophers have spent considerable time trying to figure out exactly what he meant by phrases such as, “the act itself is different,” and “only the necessary first step of an act . . .”

All other issues aside, one possible interpretation of Mill’s footnote is that intention is affirmed rather than motive because there is a direct link between intentions and the consequences of an act, whereas there is no direct link between motives and consequences. To explain this view, some context is needed. One serious problem with Mill’s intent-based account is that he seems to be making two contradictory claims. Jonathan Dancy writes: “There is of course a general difficulty in coping with Mill’s claim that (6) the morality of the action depends entirely on the intention. How is this compatible with his utilitarianism? Should not the rightness or wrongness of the action depend on its consequences?”¹¹⁶ One wants to ask Mill: “Which is it? Do the consequences determine the moral status of an act or is it intentions?” Dancy suggests that one way around this problem is to embrace both positions by

¹¹⁵ Christoph Schmidt-Petri, “Mill and the Footnote,” 344.

¹¹⁶ Dancy, “Mill’s Puzzling Footnote,” 220. This same point is made in Schmidt-Petri, “Mill and the Footnote,” 339.

arguing that “only intended consequences count.”¹¹⁷ Schmidt-Petri is quick to argue that if this is what Mill intended, then he should have said so clearly and offered a reply to the following objection: “But an action causing terrible suffering could not plausibly become less wrong just because the person performing it is careless at predicting its consequences or even culpably ignorant of what will happen as a result of his action—if anything, it makes matters even worse.”¹¹⁸

But there is another response to the apparent incompatibility between Mill’s utilitarianism and his claim that intentions have deontic relevance. Schmidt-Petri writes: “If the benign rescuer pulling the drowning person out of the pond wants to save him, the person will be saved. If the tyrant wants to torture and kill him, he will be tortured and killed. Clearly, the difference in intention brings about a difference in the effects.”¹¹⁹ If one substitutes “consequences” for the word “effects,” then it becomes clearer why Mill might have believed that intentions are a necessary component in act evaluation. Being a utilitarian, changing the intent necessarily results in a different act which automatically results in a different outcome. Take a look at the following two examples:

Intent A → Act AA → Consequences AAA

Intent B → Act BB → Consequences BBB

For the sake of the example, if you eliminate the column of acts for visual effect, then intent A ultimately leads to consequences AAA and intent B leads to consequences BBB. Intent A cannot lead to any other consequences. In whatever situation is being analyzed, the only way that you can have consequences other than AAA is if you change the original intent that initiated the entire sequence. In any given situation, there is an intrinsic connection between a particular intent and particular consequences, and changing the intent always results in different consequences. Schmidt-Petri makes this point nicely, writing: “If the moral value of an action is determined by its

¹¹⁷ Dancy, “Mill’s Puzzling Footnote,” 220.

¹¹⁸ Schmidt-Petri, “Mill and the Footnote,” 340.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 346.

consequences, the consequences depend entirely on the intention of the agent, the moral value also depends ‘entirely’ on the intention of the agent.”¹²⁰ By this logic, the direct link between intentions and the consequences of an act demonstrates that intentions are fundamentally connected to consequences, and in utilitarianism, the consequences are what determine the moral rightness or wrongness of an act. Thus, intentions are an integral component of acts and therefore part of what must be considered when evaluating the deontic status of any particular act.

Although this argument is a good attempt to reconcile Mill’s insistence that both intent and consequences are pivotal for act evaluation, its application is limited. First of all, does this position necessarily require one to adopt the extreme anti-motivist position? There seems to be room to allow motives to have deontic relevance at least in some instances even if you allow intentions a more dominant role. A second and potentially stronger criticism revolves around the nature of Utilitarianism itself. Sverdlik suggests that ultimately, Mill’s intent-based account of assessing acts is a direct result of his overall commitment to the principles of Utilitarianism. Sverdlik writes: “the motive of an action, as such, is one of the causes of it and thus belongs to the history of the world preceding the action. A completely ‘forward-looking’ theory of rightness like consequentialism cannot allow that the antecedent of an action affects its rightness.”¹²¹ However, he further observes that the “conclusion that [*Motive Matters*] is false collapses if we reject [utilitarianism’s] claim that only features of the world after the action are relevant to its rightness and wrongness.”¹²² To my knowledge, the forward-looking conclusion that an antecedent of an action cannot have deontic relevance would not be consistent with any other normative theory, suggesting that Mill’s argument for an intent-based account of act evaluation is completely dependent on initial consent to the principles of utilitarianism.¹²³ As Schmidt-Petri pointed out, if

¹²⁰ Ibid., 347.

¹²¹ Sverdlik, *Motive and Rightness*, 8.

¹²² Ibid., 8.

¹²³ Like motives, intentions are also antecedent to an action, but they, unlike motives, are said to have deontic relevance.

consequences ultimately determine the moral status of an act and intentions are directly linked to consequences in a one-to-one correspondence, then Mill's intent-based view might need to be adopted if one is a utilitarian. However, the obvious rejoinder is: "What if you are not a utilitarian?" Considering the fact that Protestant ethics might resemble a utilitarian ethic least in comparison to other normative theories, there is no reason to demand that Protestant ethics must first disprove Mill's intent-based view before proceeding to argue for a motive-based account of acts and in particular, acts of supererogation. For example, pretend that person Y holds theory Z, and in theory Z, "A is dependent on B and C" is a fundamental axiom. If person X, unlike person Y, does not hold theory Z, then person X is no longer bound to accept the proposition: "A is dependent upon B and C." In this analogy, theory Z is Mill's utilitarianism, A is an act's moral deontic status, B is consequences and C is intent. Thus, because person X rejects theory Z altogether, then they are not bound to accept that an act's deontic status (i.e., A) is dependent on either consequences (i.e., B), intentions (i.e., C), or both. Therefore, person X (i.e., myself) can begin straightaway with motive, since they are not asking the question about motive and deontic relevance within the framework of theory Z. All of this to say, Protestant ethics can ask the question, "Are there examples of motives having deontic relevance?" without first having to stop to address Mill's argument. In the next section, I will focus on a few acts in the New Testament. For now, I want to present an example of motives having deontic relevance that Sverdlik provides. This is the desire for money.¹²⁴

Regarding the *desire for money* motive, Sverdlik writes: "Mill says that an agent who saves someone from drowning 'does what is right' even if her motive is 'the hope of being paid' for her trouble."¹²⁵ He then writes that Mill may be right about saving the drowning person regardless of motive. This might seem like an odd way to begin if you are wanting to show that motives can have deontic relevance, but it presents no problem for Sverdlik because he later admits that his goal is modest in that he only wants to show that

¹²⁴ Sverdlik, *Motive and Rightness*, 14–15.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

motives are only *sometimes* deontically relevant (i.e., he is not a strong-motivist). After admitting that Mill may be right that the morally right act in the drowning case is to save the person no matter the motive, Sverdlik then presents four cases where he believes motive does make a deontic difference. In the first instance, he uses one of Mill's phrases in the drowning example. Sverdlik writes: "But I think that many people would say that if someone has sex with someone else 'in the hope of being paid,' the agent would be acting wrongly."¹²⁶ Conversely, Sverdlik goes on to say that many people would agree that if an agent has sex with someone else because they love the other person, then the act would not be wrong. In this case, expressing love is deemed a proper motive for sex whereas the motive to earn money via sex is deemed morally wrong. If we assume that all other factors are similar and that the only difference is motive, then it appears that the sex act to express love is morally right whereas the sex act to earn money is morally wrong. This is an example of a motive having deontic relevance.

Sverdlik then mentions two more acts that "mix badly" with the *desire for money* motive: (1) marrying someone for money, and (2) putting a child up for adoption in order to gain money. If someone were to marry because they were offered a large sum of money but cared nothing for the person, then it seems undeniable that this act would be morally wrong. If motive is not considered, then the act of marriage is ambiguous. It could be for money, but it could also be for love. An appeal to motive is required in order to assess the deontic status of the act. The same is true of putting a child up for adoption. If a parent genuinely feels that they do not have the mental, emotional, or financial means to raise a child, then putting the child up for adoption could be the right thing to do even if it results in the parent receiving money. The key to unlocking the deontic status of the act is whether gaining money is the main reason (i.e., motive) that the parent put the child up for adoption. In each case, the point is the same: *motive seems to play a crucial role in determining the deontic status of each act*. Following Hughes' lead, the person in each of the

¹²⁶ Ibid., 14.

named situations has a “total obligation” to not use someone as a mere means (the second version of Kant’s categorical imperative). However, we do not know whether a person has performed the “total obligation” without reference to motive. As Thielicke emphasized, the act itself is ambiguous until imbued with content, and in both the marriage and adoption case, motive is what supplies the deontically relevant content.

Though I do not endorse the entirety of Joseph Fletcher’s *situational ethics*, it is to his credit that he emphasizes the absolute necessity of considering all relevant aspects of a situation before deciding which particular act ought to be performed in a specific situation. For Fletcher, only agapeic love is “intrinsically good”¹²⁷ and for this reason, all else (including laws and commands) is disposable if it competes with love’s way in any given situation.¹²⁸ His overall point is that the morally right act cannot be decided *a priori*. One can only determine the moral rightness of an act (i.e., the most loving act) once the relevant contingencies of the situation are available for consideration. In other words, context is crucial. In Sverdlik’s sex example, a deontically relevant part of the context is the agent’s motive (i.e., expressing love or earning money). Taking some liberty with Fletcher’s view, if we say that motive counts as one of the situational factors upon which the moral character of an act depends, then my view at least partially aligns with his.

The main point in this section is that there are three good reasons for rejecting Heyd’s and Archer’s intention-based accounts of moral worth: (1) thinking that intentions determine moral worth does not seem to require the anti-motivism that Mill, Heyd, and Archer all embrace; (2) Sverdlik provides strong evidence by way of example that motives can have deontic relevance; and (3) Mill’s intent-based theory, which is utilized by both Heyd and Archer in their respective accounts, seems to require that a person accept the more general theory of utilitarianism. After responding to each, I maintain that motives can play an important role in determining the deontic status of an act.

¹²⁷ Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1966): 57.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 45, 71, 78.

Application of the Motive-Based Account

In this section, the supererogatory act of an innocent spouse reconciling with an adulterous spouse in chapter three is revisited and evaluated from the perspective that proper motive is necessary if any act is to be classified as supererogatory in Protestant ethics. Although my main focus will be on this act, certain acts discussed in the New Testament are mentioned in an effort to show that motives do have deontic relevance in Protestant ethics.

I argued in chapter three that according to Matthew's Gospel, an innocent spouse is permitted to divorce an adulterous spouse. This is by no means a command, but a concession. Jesus does not require the innocent spouse to divorce; if they want to remain and be reconciled to the spouse who has committed adultery, then it is permitted. Based on this account, an innocent spouse's choice to remain and reconcile is supererogatory because: (1) it is not obligatory (i.e., Jesus does not command the innocent spouse to reconcile), (2) it is not forbidden (i.e., Jesus does not command the innocent spouse to divorce), and (3) the act possesses moral worth. Also in chapter three, I mentioned that I would revisit this act in the latter half of this chapter to show that these three criteria are necessary but not sufficient conditions to earn a supererogatory classification; proper motive is also required.

Regarding the innocent spouse's act of remaining and reconciling with a spouse who has committed adultery, motive plays a crucial role in determining the deontic status of the act. To say this differently, the innocent spouse's act of remaining and reconciling should not be classified as supererogatory in the absence of a proper motive. Using Grudem's list of eleven proper Christian motives that he believes would be pleasing to God in acts of obedience (and by extension, acts of supererogation), eight are particularly relevant. They are as follows:¹²⁹

- (1) a desire to please God and express our love to him . . .
- (2) the need to keep a clear conscience before God . . .
- (3) the desire to be a 'vessel for noble use' and have increased effectiveness in the work of the

¹²⁹ The numbers used earlier in the chapter are kept so that it makes it easier to identify which motives have been omitted.

Kingdom . . . (4) the desire to see unbelievers come to Christ through observing our lives . . . (5) the desire to receive present blessings from God on our lives and ministries . . . (7) the desire to seek greater heavenly reward . . . (8) the desire for a deeper walk with God . . . (10) the desire for peace . . . and joy in our lives . . .¹³⁰

In one way or another, all eight of these motives would satisfy the proper motive condition from a Protestant perspective for this particular act. However, I want to narrow the list further and focus on the motives (3), (4), and (8).

In chapter three, I argued that the innocent spouse's act of remaining and reconciling with a spouse who has committed adultery possesses moral worth for the following four specific reasons: the act (a) embodies God's forgiveness for the guilty spouse, (b) produces holiness, (c) is evangelistic in nature, and (d) is in the best interests of any children involved. Of these four reasons, reason (a) corresponds with motive (3) in Grudem's list, reason (b) corresponds with motive (8), and reason (c) corresponds with motive (4). I will now take each in turn in an effort to show what form a proper motive might take in order to satisfy the motive-based criterion that I have defended in this chapter.

As stated in chapter three, one of the main reasons that an innocent spouse reconciling with a spouse who has committed adultery possesses moral worth is that it embodies God's mercy and forgiveness for the partner who has sinned. For the spouse who has committed adultery and who is repentant, the road to forgiving oneself might be long, and as explained in chapter three, the innocent spouse's decision to remain and reconcile can help make God's willingness to forgive much more real. Thus, the act of remaining and reconciling possesses great moral value. From the perspective of motive, the act of remaining and reconciling in order to embody forgiveness for the guilty spouse closely resembles the third motive that Grudem praises: "the desire to be a 'vessel for noble use' and have increased effectiveness in the work of the Kingdom."¹³¹ By effectiveness, I simply mean that God's mercy and forgiveness can be made more believable and thus more real to the spouse

¹³⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 757.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 757.

who has committed adultery. If the innocent spouse remains and reconciles in order to make the mercy and forgiveness of God more real to the guilty spouse, then the innocent spouse is allowing God to use them as a vessel in order to further his kingdom work in the life of the guilty spouse. From a Christian perspective, this is definitely a proper motive and easily satisfies the fourth criterion for supererogation in Protestant ethics.

There are also other motives that the innocent spouse could act from that would satisfy the fourth criterion of proper motive. Returning to chapter three, the second reason that I gave for why the innocent spouse's act of remaining and reconciling is morally praiseworthy is that it has the potential to produce holiness. The act of remaining and reconciling with an adulterous spouse possesses moral worth because it can lead to an increase of holiness in the life of the innocent spouse. This somewhat corresponds with Grudem's eighth motive: "the desire for a deeper walk with God."¹³² If the innocent spouse chooses to remain and reconcile because they view the act as an opportunity to identify with Christ in a deeper way than ever before, this decision will allow the innocent spouse to experience emotionally much of what God experiences when humans sin and desert God. This has a direct influence on a person's relationship—or "walk," as Grudem writes—with God. The reason is simple: acts of empathy possess great potential to strengthen the relationship between two people. The *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* defines empathy as: "the state of being emotionally and cognitively 'in tune with' another person, particularly by feeling what their situation is like from the inside, or what it is like for them."¹³³ Rather than interpret the phrase "in tune with" in mystical fashion, this phrase can be interpreted to simply mean that empathy enables a being to better understand what another person is experiencing on a cognitive and emotional level. As most people have experienced, a greater intimacy between two beings is often forged when the sufferer believes that another understands what they are feeling and what they are enduring. Essentially, intimacy can grow in the soil of shared suffering, by

¹³² Ibid., 757.

¹³³ Blackburn, "Empathy," in *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 113.

identification. The apostle Paul appears to provide support for this point in the context of his relationship with Jesus Christ, writing: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death. . . .”¹³⁴ Thus, when an innocent spouse chooses not only to forgive, but to remain and reconcile, they position themselves to feel much of what God must feel due to the fact that he too has been betrayed at some point by every human being. This shared emotional experience can result in the transformation of the person in one way or another, ultimately resulting in greater holiness. Granted, not every act of empathy will result in a closer relationship between two people, but this does not alter the fact that it not only can, but often does, result in greater intimacy. In a sense, the relationship between the increase in intimacy with God and the increase in holiness in the life of a Christian is reciprocal—*as one becomes more like Christ, it is very likely that they will love Christ more, and as their love for Christ grows, it is also very likely that they will become more and more like Christ (i.e., increase in holiness).*

Another motive in Grudem’s list I wish to focus on is the fourth: “the desire to see unbelievers come to Christ through observing our lives.”¹³⁵ This mirrors what I explained in chapter three when I wrote that one of the reasons that the innocent spouse’s act of remaining and reconciling with a spouse who has committed adultery possesses moral worth is that it is evangelistic in nature. An innocent spouse could choose to remain and reconcile because, amidst other reasons, they desire the restored relationship in order to demonstrate to unbelievers that God is real and able to provide the needed grace to forgive and work through difficult issues in order to save the marriage. This can serve as evidence—an ἀπολογία—that God *is* real and wants to come to the assistance of people. In the end, this could result in emotionally wounded people who are not Christians seeking salvation and hope in Christ. Also, the reconciled marriage can serve as a catalyst to reawaken and motivate other compromised Christians as was mentioned in chapter three.

¹³⁴ Phil. 3:10.

¹³⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 757.

Or, it could simply provide needed encouragement to another Christian who has lost hope that God is going to be faithful in their circumstances.

Before moving on, imagine the innocent spouse remaining and reconciling the marriage with the guilty spouse from an improper—even vengeful—motive, rather than from one of the motives just discussed. It could be that the spouse wants to reconcile the marriage so that they can be in a good position to emotionally torment the guilty spouse. From the innocent spouse’s perspective, the best way to accomplish this goal would be to reconcile with the spouse so that once they are together again, the innocent spouse can employ various passive-aggressive techniques in an effort to “pay back” the spouse who committed adultery. The innocent spouse will need to pretend two things: that they (1) have forgiven the guilty spouse (or is at least in the process of doing so), and (2) have a genuine desire to reconcile the marriage for all the right reasons. In this scenario, the innocent spouse’s motivation for remaining and reconciling is vengeful. The innocent spouse is only wanting to reconcile the marriage so that they are in an optimal position to inflict future emotional harm (i.e., through shaming, manipulation, etc.). In this example, the intent is clearly to remain and reconcile. However, as stated earlier in the chapter, the intent by itself does not reveal *why* the subject wants to bring about this state of affairs. Instead, the intention only shows the *state of affairs* that the innocent spouse wants to bring about. Like Judas’ kiss mentioned earlier in the chapter, the moral status of the innocent spouse’s act of reconciling with the guilty spouse is unclear without knowledge of their motive. Without knowing this, the act of remaining and reconciling is ambiguous because, as Thielicke points out, the “inner structure” of the act cannot be determined.¹³⁶ Knowing the innocent spouse’s intention does not tell us much. The reason is simple: *a particular state of affairs can be brought about for morally good or morally bad reasons*. Only the motive tells us whether the act is meritorious or not, and whether the performance of the act is praiseworthy or blameworthy. Considering this, how could the act of remaining

¹³⁶ Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, 22.

and reconciling be classified as supererogatory if the innocent spouse's sole motivation for doing so is to be in a better position to inflict psychological harm? Based on what we know of God as revealed in the New Testament, would he not prefer the innocent spouse to forego marital reconciliation than reconcile only as a means to inflict harm? I think the answer is "yes." To express this point in more analytical terms, how could motives not have deontic relevance if there are situations like the one just described when if a person has motive X, God approves of the act, but if the person has motive Y, then God does not? In this situation, the motive of the agent determines the deontic status of the act whereas the intention does not.

Contrary to Heyd's and Archer's views that intentions, not motives, have deontic relevance, it appears that the exact opposite may be true when comparing the two scenarios—the innocent spouse reconciling the marriage from a proper Christian motive versus the innocent spouse reconciling the marriage from an improper Christian motive—from a Protestant viewpoint. It appears that the intent to reconcile the marriage is the same for both the innocent spouse acting from a proper motive and the innocent spouse who only intends to reconcile in order to be in a better position to inflict harm. This implies that the deontic status of acts cannot be determined by intentions in Protestant ethics, or else, one would be forced to accept the claim that the innocent spouse in both scenarios has behaved in a supererogatory manner. But surely this is not the case. Reconciling in order to satisfy one's desire (i.e., motive) to inflict harm is wrong from a Christian standpoint and is therefore sinful. It cannot be claimed that in this instance, motive only relates to the character of the agent but does not affect the deontic status of the act.¹³⁷ This is because motive is the only way to distinguish between the two external acts. So while Mill may be right that motives provide us with glimpses into a person's character, his anti-motivism is too strong because there are situations where the deontic status of an act (from a Protestant perspective) hinges upon motives.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 26.

Besides the act in question, there are other acts in the New Testament where motive appears to make a deontic difference. Although these do not directly involve acts of supererogation, they are valuable because they shed light on the fact that the deontic status of an act can change depending on the motive. Returning to Matthew 6, which was mentioned earlier in this chapter, Jesus talks about three acts whose deontic status seems to rely on motive. Regarding giving, praying, or fasting, he rebukes the Pharisees for acting from self-centered motives. Concerning giving, Jesus accuses them of doing so “that they may be praised by others”;¹³⁸ concerning prayer, he accuses them of doing so “that they may be seen by others”;¹³⁹ and regarding fasting, he accuses them of doing so “to show others.”¹⁴⁰ Concerning each criticism, respectively, Jesus begins his instructions to his disciples in the following manner: “But when you give alms. . . . But whenever you pray. . . . But when you fast. . . .”¹⁴¹ The point is that Jesus does not tell his disciples to avoid performing these acts. Rather, he tells them to perform the *same* acts but from different motives. In other words, motive plays a crucial role in determining whether God approves of an act, which supports my claim that motives have deontic relevance for some acts in the New Testament. Granted, I am concerned with acts of supererogation, but this shows that whatever classification of act is in question, motives can have deontic relevance.

In harmony with what Matthew recorded in Matthew 6 about prayer, Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47 reveal that Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for saying long prayers “for the sake of appearance.” In both verses, the Greek word from which the phrase, “sake of appearance” is translated is πρόφασις (prophasis). The word means: “that which appears in front, that which is put forward to hide the true state of things; a fair show or pretext.”¹⁴² It is to act in such a way “as

¹³⁸ Matt. 6:2.

¹³⁹ Matt. 6:5.

¹⁴⁰ Matt. 6:16.

¹⁴¹ Matt. 6:3, 6, 17.

¹⁴² Mounce, “πρόφασις,” *The Analytical Lexicon*, 401; Wesley J. Perschbacher, ed. “πρόφασις,” in *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1990), 357.

to disguise one's real motives."¹⁴³ This Greek word occurs in six places in the New Testament, although not every instance is relevant due to the shift in meaning due to context.¹⁴⁴ Depending on the context, the word can mean any of the following: "actual motive or reason, valid excuse; pretext, ostensible reason, excuse, false motive."¹⁴⁵ According to another source, the word can mean either a "real motive" or a "falsely alleged motive."¹⁴⁶ In Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47, the phrase "sake of appearance" seems to be a clear reference to a falsely alleged motive. Jesus is rebuking the Pharisees because though their praying appears to be a sign of their devotion to God, this is hiding "the true state of things" which is that they are selfish, consumed with winning people's praise, and seem to care nothing about really conversing with God. Their act of praying appears to be righteous from an external standpoint, but this only disguises the true selfish nature of the act. Because their motives are false and not pleasing to God, their "long prayers" do nothing but earn them "greater condemnation."¹⁴⁷ This strong language gives no impression that the act of praying with a false motive could ever be pleasing to God. On the other hand, praying with a motive to bless God, petition his help, or pray for others is pleasing to him and an act that he rewards.¹⁴⁸ The bottom line is that if one is praying to God, motive occupies a decisive role in determining the deontic status of the act.¹⁴⁹

Another place where the word πρόφασις is used to refer to motive is 1 Thessalonians 2:5. Concerning preaching, Paul writes: "we never came with

¹⁴³ W.E. Vine, "πρόφασις," in *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (London: Oliphants, 1975), 197.

¹⁴⁴ John 15:22 and Acts 27:30 are good examples.

¹⁴⁵ Warren C. Trenchard, "πρόφασις," in *A Concise Dictionary of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 136.

¹⁴⁶ F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, "πρόφασις," in *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 173.

¹⁴⁷ Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47.

¹⁴⁸ "Reward" is mentioned in Matt. 6:6.

¹⁴⁹ One might initially object to the discussion about prayer on the grounds that the act is not moral in nature. However, considering the fact that God commands prayer throughout the New Testament, it is obligatory as any other moral duty. That being said, it would be sad if a Christian never matures to the point that prayer is also a delight, but this is another matter. But this last observation does not change the fact that prayer is commanded, and thus obligatory, and consequently, prayerlessness a sin.

words of flattery or with a pretext [πρόφασις] for greed. . . .”¹⁵⁰ By way of reminder, Sverdlik defends the idea that a greed-related desire can serve as a motive in some instances, so Paul referring to greed as an immoral motive is a fitting example.¹⁵¹ Paul wants the people in the church at Thessalonica to know that his reason (i.e., motive) for preaching was not a desire to earn money or benefit materially. His preaching was: “not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts.”¹⁵² The motive to “please God” aligns well with Thielicke’s use of Colossians 3:23 as the ultimate motive from which a Christian is to act: “Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and [not unto men].” It explains the “why” behind Paul’s preaching.¹⁵³ In addition to greed, Paul also mentions “flattery” and “seek[ing] praise from mortals” as potentially wrong motives for preaching in order to communicate that these were not motives from which he preached.¹⁵⁴ The bottom line is that Paul wanted the church in Thessalonica to know that he never performed the act of preaching in their church from false or impure motive.

Using the Greek definition for πρόφασις, his act of preaching had not been a facade in order to “put forward to hide the true state of things.” In Thielicke’s terms, Paul is claiming that his acts of preaching in the past are genuine because “there is an agreement between the inner side” (i.e., motive) and “the outer” (i.e., the act of preaching itself).¹⁵⁵ His preaching gives the appearance that he wants to please the Lord and that he cares about the spiritual state of the believers, and Paul is writing that these were his true motives. In Vine’s terms, nothing needs *disguising* because what the act suggests and the underlying motive are in agreement. Interestingly, Paul makes a similar comment in one of his letters to the church in Corinth concerning preaching and greed that serves to endorse Thielicke’s point. Paul writes: “For we are not peddlers of God’s word like so many; but in Christ we

¹⁵⁰ 1 Thess. 2:5–6.

¹⁵¹ Sverdlik, *Motive and Rightness*, 21.

¹⁵² 1 Thess. 2:4.

¹⁵³ Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, 21; Thielicke uses the language: “not unto men” rather than “not for your masters.” The ESV and the NASB do the same unlike the NRSV.

¹⁵⁴ 1 Thess. 2:5–6.

¹⁵⁵ Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, 21.

speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence.”¹⁵⁶ For Paul, a preacher who is ultimately motivated by the prospect of earning money is not sincere because they are handling the Gospel as a commercial item. What Paul is saying in his letter is that he and his preaching are sincere because his motivation has never been to earn money; therefore, he can be trusted. This aligns well with Thieliicke’s point that part of what it means to be rightly motivated from a Christian standpoint is that a person’s act does not suggest something that is contrary to the underlying motive from which they act. According to Paul, his preaching is sincere—what Thieliicke would label “genuine”—because he has preached from a motive to glorify God and benefit others rather than to benefit himself.

As further evidence that motives are being discussed in this passage, the phrase “impure motives,”¹⁵⁷ occurs in 1 Thessalonians 2:3. The verse reads: “For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery. . . .” In this verse, “impure motives” is translated from the Greek, “ἀκαθαρσία” (*akatharsia*). This is different from the word, “πρόφασις” which occurs in verse five of this same chapter and is used to indicate a motive of greed. The Greek definition of ἀκαθαρσία is “uncleanness; lewdness; impurity of motive.”¹⁵⁸ The word appears a total of ten times in the New Testament, but only in 1 Thessalonians 2:3 does it bear any resemblance to motive as I define the term in this chapter. Trenchard defines this term as “dirt, refuse; immorality, vileness.”¹⁵⁹ As in verse five in this chapter, Paul is talking about preaching and telling the church in Thessalonica that he never preached *immorally*—that is, from wrong motives. Using Trenchard’s terminology, to preach from impure motives would be vile. Paul seems to be making the point that to preach from a proper motive is praiseworthy, whereas to preach from a motive of flattery, greed, or the desire to gain praise is morally wrong. Once more, the basic idea is that if one performs an act—in this case, preaching—from a proper motive,

¹⁵⁶ 2 Cor. 2:17.

¹⁵⁷ 1 Thess. 2:3.

¹⁵⁸ Mounce, “ἀκαθαρσία,” *The Analytical Lexicon*, 58; Perschbacher, ed. “ἀκαθαρσία,” *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*, 11.

¹⁵⁹ Trenchard, “ἀκαθαρσία,” *A Concise Dictionary*, 5.

they have acted rightly, whereas if they have performed the same act from a improper motive, they have acted wrongly. This is yet another example in the New Testament where motive makes a deontic difference in the classification of an act.

As in the passages on giving, prayer, and fasting, it is difficult to imagine God approving of Paul's preaching if in fact he acted from "impure motives." If Paul's ultimate motive was any of the impure motives mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 2:5–6a, then according to Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 2:17, he would not have been sincere in his preaching. An impure motive can result in insincere preaching that is ultimately motivated by selfish ambition. This kind of preaching is condemned in Paul's letter to the church in Philippi. He writes: "the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment."¹⁶⁰ The word "sincerely" is translated from the Greek term "ἀγνῶς" (hagnōs), meaning "purely, with sincerity."¹⁶¹ This occurs once as an adverb in the New Testament and another eight times as the adjective "ἀγνός." In adjective form, the word means "pure, chaste, modest, innocent, blameless."¹⁶² Of the nine occurrences, Philippians 1:17 is the only place where something similar to our concept of motive is inferred. The adverb ἀγνῶς modifies the verb "proclaim" in Philippians 1:17, conveying that some have proclaimed Christ in an impure, or insincere, manner. This is a clear reference to motive. Vine provides support for this claim that this is a clear reference to motive when he writes that ἀγνῶς, "denotes with pure motives." This lends credence to the NASB translation of "οὐ ἀγνός" as "rather than from pure motives." Paul is accusing several individuals of preaching from selfish motives rather than doing so as "unto the Lord." Motives matter in assessing whether the act of preaching is right or wrong in any given context.

¹⁶⁰ Phil. 1:17.

¹⁶¹ Mounce, "ἀγνῶς," *The Analytical Lexicon*, 51; Perschbacher, ed. "ἀγνῶς," *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*, 4. Similarly, "ἀγνῶς," is defined as "purely, sincerely" in two other sources. See Trenchard, "ἀγνῶς," *A Concise Dictionary*, 2. See also Gingrich and Danker, "ἀγνῶς," *Shorter Lexicon*, 3.

¹⁶² Mounce, "ἀγνός," *The Analytical Lexicon*, 51; Perschbacher, ed. "ἀγνός," *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*, 4.

There are two other Greek words in the New Testament that are used to communicate something similar to motive: “κακός” (kakos), and διαλογισμός (dialogismos). The term “κακός” is an adjective that appears 50 times in the New Testament and has several different meanings depending on context. It is used to refer to a corrupt disposition on at least five occasions, evil behavior at least 19 times, and wrong motive once. Concerning the one time that the word refers to motive, it appears as an adverb: “κακῶς.” James 4:3 reads: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly [κακῶς], in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.” The word “κακῶς” is related to κακός, which occurs 16 times in the New Testament, and means: “amiss.”¹⁶³ Trenchard even states that part of the definition for κακῶς is “with wrong motives.” In this verse, the adverb “κακῶς” modifies the verb “ask,” and reveals that the recipients of James’ letter were asking *amiss* because they were asking with a wrong motive. James is not communicating that they are wrong for asking, but instead, that they are not presenting their requests to God for the right reasons. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, a motive is the reason that compels a person to act no matter what form the reason assumes, so to ask for selfish reasons is to ask from motives that are “bad, evil, and base.”¹⁶⁴ It is to ask with wrong motives. James is saying that some Christians were not receiving what they were asking for in prayer because of their wrong motives. So while this has more to do with how to pray and receive a favorable answer to one’s prayers, it is yet another instance of the importance of motive.

The Greek term διαλογισμός appears in the New Testament 14 times and means “reasoning; thought, opinion, design; dispute, argument, doubt.”¹⁶⁵ Of these, only James 2:4 appears to be a reference to motive. James writes: “and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, ‘Have a

¹⁶³ Mounce, “κακῶς,” *The Analytical Lexicon*, 261; Perschbacher, ed. “κακῶς,” *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*, 217.

¹⁶⁴ Trenchard, “κακός,” *A Concise Dictionary*, 80.

¹⁶⁵ Trenchard, “διαλογισμός,” *A Concise Dictionary*, 36. In Mounce’s definition, three similar but distinct definitions are given. Based on the context, it is the first definition that corresponds with the way that διαλογισμός is used in James 2:4. The first definition reads as follows: “reasoning, thought, cogitation, purpose.” See Mounce, “διαλογισμός,” *The Analytical Lexicon*, 140.

seat here, please,' while to the one who is poor you say, 'Stand there,' or, 'Sit at my feet,' have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts [διαλογισμός]?"¹⁶⁶ In order to show that διαλογισμός can be viewed as "motives" in this verse, context is required. As with many passages in the New Testament, there are several different interpretations of what is occurring among those to whom James is writing. For the sake of clarity, two aspects are worth mentioning. First, there are three groups involved in the passage under investigation: the poor, the rich, and the recipients of the letter.¹⁶⁷ Secondly, the type of meeting where this behavior is occurring is—as William Brosend writes—"not at all clear."¹⁶⁸ Part of the confusion is that the word "assembly" in James 2:2 is translated from the Greek word "συναγωγή," which means in this particular context: "the congregation of a synagogue."¹⁶⁹ This suggests that it is a meeting of Jews. However, this is not necessarily the case because as James Adamson notes: "Till the final rift between Judaism and Christianity both Christian and non-Christian Jews used, at least often, the same word for their sacred meeting-place."¹⁷⁰ Dale Allison names six possible interpretative options for συναγωγή: (1) a Christian religious gathering, (2) a Christian building, (3) a Christian court, (4) a Jewish religious gathering, (5) a Jewish building, and last, (6) a Jewish court.¹⁷¹ Having listed the options, he gives his own view that the most accurate interpretation is that the word is a "reference to entering a synagogue building (5) for a judicial convocation (6)." Contrary to Allison, Scot McKnight writes that the court interpretation of συναγωγή is most likely wrong due to the fact that there is no "sketch of a judge, defendants, and litigants" in James 2:2–4.¹⁷² For my purposes, I will assume that James is referring to a "Christian gathering, to which visitors rich

¹⁶⁶ James 2:3–4.

¹⁶⁷ Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle of James* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 376.

¹⁶⁸ William F. Brosend II, *James & Jude* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 58.

¹⁶⁹ Mounce, "συναγωγή," *The Analytical Lexicon*, 432.

¹⁷⁰ James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1976), 105.

¹⁷¹ Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 386.

¹⁷² Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 186.

or poor may come.”¹⁷³ Besides, as Brosend mentions, the emphasis in James 2:1-4 is “not on the type of gathering,” but rather, on the “treatment of visitors no matter what the gathering.”¹⁷⁴

Having presented the background to this passage that is commensurate with my aim in this section, the question remains: “Are there justifiable reasons from a biblical perspective to think that *διαλογισμός* in James 2:4 might refer to motive?” Unlike the passage in James 4 about prayer, this passage is clearly about moral behavior because it is about how Christians treat others. James is concerned that Christians are trying to “combine faith in Christ with worship of social status.”¹⁷⁵ Making the same point but in different words, Kurt Richardson writes: “a combination of favoritism and faith in Jesus is impossible.”¹⁷⁶ James is contrasting the “exaggerated courtesy” in greeting the wealthy visitor with the “dismissive ‘stand there’” treatment of the poor visitor.¹⁷⁷ He “likens [their] discriminator behavior to that of corrupt judges who are biased or bribed and give rulings in preference to rich clients. . . .”¹⁷⁸ Ultimately, this is sinful,¹⁷⁹ because the behavior represents a breach of the “royal law according to the scripture” which is: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”¹⁸⁰ However, James is doing more than condemning their behavior: he is also condemning the thoughts that give rise to the behavior—a connection that any cognitive-behavioral therapist readily endorses¹⁸¹—as evidenced by his accusation that they had “become judges with evil thoughts [*διαλογισμός*].”¹⁸²

¹⁷³ Dan G. McCartney, *James* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 138.

¹⁷⁴ Brosend, *James & Jude*, 58.

¹⁷⁵ Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, 102.

¹⁷⁶ Kurt Richardson, *James*, in *The New American Commentary*, vol. 36 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 107.

¹⁷⁷ Brosend, *James & Jude*, 59.

¹⁷⁸ McCartney, *James*, 140.

¹⁷⁹ James actually writes that showing partiality is a sin in James 2:9.

¹⁸⁰ James 2:8.

¹⁸¹ David G. Myers and C. Nathan DeWall, *Psychology*, 12 ed. (New York, NY: Worth Publishers, 2018), 621–622; “Cognitive Behavioral Therapy,” *Psychology Today*, accessed February 4, 2020, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/therapy-types/cognitive-behavioral-therapy>.

¹⁸² James 2:4.

Returning to the question posed earlier: “Are there justifiable reasons from a biblical perspective to think that διαλογισμός in James 2:4 might refer to motive?” According to McKnight, διαλογισμός refers to “corrupt mental process[es]” that result in any of the following: (1) “severing the unity,” (2) “usurping the place of God,” (3) using a worldly standard that roots honor in wealth and status,” and (4) “corrupting the mind of Christians to render judgement on God’s will for the community.”¹⁸³ In this list of possible meanings, no clear reference to motive can be found. However, other commentators have said otherwise. Concerning διαλογισμός in James 2:4, Brosend writes: “James’s own judgment is as swift as his examples is brief: you are making judgments about and distinctions among those who come to your assembly, thereby not only making judges of yourselves but judges with questionable, even evil, motives.”¹⁸⁴ Although he opts for a different interpretation of διαλογισμός than “motives,” McCartney admits that in this context, διαλογισμός “might mean ‘having evil motives.’”¹⁸⁵ Douglas Moo also suggests that translating διαλογισμός as “motives” is “a perfectly acceptable rendering,” although he ultimately thinks that “standards” is a better translation.¹⁸⁶ The point here is not to present a conclusive argument that διαλογισμός ought to be translated as “motives.” Instead, my more modest goal is to show that interpreting διαλογισμός as “motives” is a viable option and will provide another example of how motives can have deontic relevance. Besides, even if διαλογισμός does not refer to “motive” in this specific context, one does not have to expend much effort to imagine an ecclesial context where favoritism is shown for motives related to social status. For example, a pastor might pay more attention to wealthy folk who enter the church because they possess more potential for increasing the amount of money given each week. It could be that a layperson who serves as a door-greeter favors wealthier individuals who enter the church because they might bring beneficial social connections

¹⁸³ McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 190.

¹⁸⁴ Brosend, *James & Jude*, 59.

¹⁸⁵ McCartney, *James*, 140.

¹⁸⁶ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Leicester: Apollos, 2000), 105.

in the community at large. Or maybe a person gives favorable treatment to the wealthy in the church because it might eventually result in a friendship that grants them access to the social elite in that community. The bottom line is that even if someone wants to argue against the claim that *διαλογισμός* means “motive” in the James 2 context, this is still a useful example for showing that motives can possess deontic relevance.

This suggests that *διαλογισμός* may mean “motives” in James 2:4. To further demonstrate how motives can have deontic relevance, consider the following revised example from James 2. Imagine a scenario where the same speech-acts are not morally wrong even though all other variables—except for motives—remain constant. If deontic status can be shown to change due to a shift in motive only, this is further evidence that motives possess deontic relevance in the New Testament. First, imagine that the same two individuals—a rich person in fine clothes and a poor person in dirty clothes—enter the assembly, as in the original context. Secondly, imagine a person in the assembly speaking the same exact words to each as recorded in the original context: “Have a seat here, please” (to the rich person), and “Stand there” (to the poor person).¹⁸⁷ Is this speech-act necessarily wrong? Based on the mere act or what Hughes labels the “act-duty” conception of duty, one cannot answer with certainty. As Thielicke argues and as I have argued throughout this chapter, motives must be consulted in order to make a conclusive judgement. The person greeting the rich and poor people could have said what was said for completely different reasons. Using James’ language, the same words could have been spoken to each person, respectively, but not because the greeter was making an ontological-ethical distinction between the two individuals based on their economic status. After all, James writes: “if you take notice.”¹⁸⁸ In this context, this does not mean that one simply noticed that one was dressed in fine clothes and the other was dressed in dirty clothes. One cannot help but notice such things. Instead,

¹⁸⁷ For the sake of simplicity, I have omitted the following imperative that was said to the poor person: “Sit at my feet.”

¹⁸⁸ James 2:3.

James is referring to “taking notice” in a moral sense. People in the church are taking notice in that they are not only observing a difference in dress and status, but they are allowing the disparity to affect how they treat each person. The NASB captures this point well: instead of using the phrase, “if you take notice,” it uses the phrase, “pay special attention.” The “taking notice” is giving preferential treatment based on the observation, not making the initial observation itself. So what if a person makes the initial observation, but chooses to not treat the rich and poor people differently? Furthermore, what if the same words are spoken to each person but with different motives? For example, pretend that the first person wearing fine clothes is an elderly man and the person wearing poor clothes is a young man. In our modified example, the rich elderly man who is wearing fine clothes is told, “Have a seat here, please,” because the greeter notices that he is obviously frail and the places to sit are nearby. On the other hand, when the young man who is poor enters, the greeter assumes that he will have no problem standing for a long period of time since he is young, so he instructs him to, “Stand there,” because the standing area is on the other side of the room. In this modified example, the same speech acts are performed toward the same person (i.e., one rich and one poor). However, the greeter does not appear to have done anything wrong in this scenario because although he could not help but notice how differently the two individuals are dressed, he does not address them based on that information. Instead, the greeter’s reason—or motive—for saying what he said to the elderly man was to provide compassionate care for him considering his physical weakness. Regarding the younger man, the greeter asks him to “stand there” on the other side of the room *only* because he wants to reserve the remaining vacant seats which are nearby (presumably near the entrance) for other elderly or disabled individuals who may attend. If anything, the greeter’s motive is loving, and he may very well walk to the other side of the room when he is finished and stand with other able-bodied individuals including the young man dressed in dirty clothes.

The point in the modified example is to demonstrate that the motives must be considered if the speech-acts in James 2 are to be accurately

classified. As Thielicke notes: “the level of overt deeds no longer tells us as a matter of course anything about the underlying level of motives . . .”¹⁸⁹ If we assume for the sake of argument that James is referring to motives with the word *διαλογισμός*, then the speech acts in James 2:3 are clearly wrong because of the motives from which the greeters act. On the contrary, the same speech acts are not morally wrong in the modified example because of the change in motive. Because all other variables were kept the same in order to isolate the motive-variable, the change in the deontic status of the speech-acts must be attributed to the change in motive because nothing else would explain it. Along with an innocent spouse’s act of reconciling a marriage with a spouse who has committed adultery, the act of prayer, the act of giving, the act of fasting, and the act of preaching, this is yet another example of why we can be confident that motives possess deontic relevance in the New Testament whether duties or acts of supererogation are being discussed.

The Indirect Relevance of Character to Acts of Supererogation

Before concluding, I wish to address the *indirect* contribution that character makes to motives and acts of supererogation. There are three reasons why this is important in Protestant ethics. First, there is a clear message throughout the New Testament that acts are often the fruit of a person’s character. This is on clear display when Jesus talks about the relationship between the condition of a tree (i.e., a person’s character or moral condition) and the quality of the fruit that is produced (i.e., acts performed including speech-acts) in the following passages: Matthew 7:15–20, 12:33–37, and Luke 6:43–45. W.D. Davies and Dale Allison draw a similar conclusion from these three passages, writing: “The subject is the continuity between outward acts and inward states. Bad deeds inhere in bad natures, good deeds

¹⁸⁹ Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, 18.

in good natures.”¹⁹⁰ Because character is closely associated with acts and the deontic status of acts is closely associated with motives, character is of some relevance to supererogation although not in a status-determining way. The second reason that character is important to the discussion of supererogation in Protestant ethics is because the value of character is often overlooked when moral philosophers discuss supererogation since the relationship between acts of supererogation and character is *indirect*. Granted, while there are notable exceptions such as Elizabeth Pybus and Gregory Trianosky, only the latter is relevant to this section and will therefore be utilized. The third reason that character is important to the discussion of supererogation is that it possesses the potential to increase the probability of supererogatory acts being performed. While this has nothing to do with determining the deontic status of a particular act in a specific set of circumstances, character is still of great significance regarding the frequency and number of supererogatory acts that are performed. More will be said on this shortly. For these three reasons, character deserves more attention in conversations about supererogation.

In chapter one, I wrote the following about character: “When we speak of an agent’s *character*, we seem to refer to a more permanent construct that informs a person’s moral attitudes and orients that person to think, feel, and act in a consistent manner from one situation to the next.” I followed this definition with Stanley Hauerwas’s definition of character: “Character is not just the sum of all that we do as agents, but rather it is the particular direction our agency acquires by choosing to act in some ways rather than others.”¹⁹¹ The reason that these definitions were offered was because character, along with intentions and motives, represent another aspect of the internal world of the agent that had the potential to affect the deontic status of an act. Having said this, no moral philosopher or Christian ethicist believes—to my knowledge—that character is *directly* relevant to whether a specific act should be classified

¹⁹⁰ W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *Introduction and Commentary on Matthew I–VII*, vol. 1, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ed. J.A. Emerton, C.E.B. Cranfield, and G.N. Stanton (London: T&T Clark, 2000), 709.

¹⁹¹ Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life*, 117.

as supererogatory. Assuming that this is correct, why does character deserve any attention at all in relation to supererogation?

The best way to answer this question is to begin by making the distinction between “direct” and “indirect” relevance. In this chapter, I have argued—contrary to Mill, Heyd, and Archer—that motives have a direct influence on the deontic classification of an act in Protestant ethics. Setting aside this difference for a moment, there is one similarity between myself, Mill, Heyd, Archer, and several others: we all believe that some item in the psychology of the agent is relevant to the deontic status of an act. This simply means that, depending upon your view, either intentions or motives have a direct and immediate effect on the deontic status of an act. On the other hand, the same cannot be said of character. In chapter one, I wrote: “A person with a vicious character may on one occasion behave in a virtuous manner. Or, a person with a virtuous character may on one occasion behave in a vicious manner.” This implies that a person’s motive and act can be inconsistent with their more general character at any given moment. Therefore, character is not helpful when trying to judge the deontic status of an act in a specific set of circumstances. Granted, it might help to consider a person’s character when trying to figure out the motive from which a person might have acted, but this would only be valuable as a means to discovering the true motive. The bottom line is that a person’s various dispositions which comprise their character does not help determine the deontic status of an act from one moment to the next.

However, this conclusion can be taken to an extreme and used to dismiss the importance of character to supererogation altogether. Character is important not because it plays a role in determining the deontic status of an act in any given situation, but because it has the potential to increase the probability of supererogatory acts being performed. Using the virtue of generosity as an example, a person with a strong disposition to this virtue (i.e., a generous person) will most likely have motives that are altruistic or generous in nature more frequently than someone who is not similarly predisposed. This means that when the person is presented with an opportunity to supererogate in the area of generosity, they will be more likely to have proper motives which

will result in them behaving in a supererogatory manner more often than someone who is not well-disposed toward generosity. At the risk of oversimplifying, a person predisposed toward generosity might have the proper motive in nine of ten situations, whereas a person who is not predisposed toward generosity might only act with proper motive three of ten times in similar situations. Because proper motive is the fourth criterion in Protestant ethics that must be satisfied in order for an act to be considered supererogatory, the above example shows that having a generous character will result in an increased number of supererogatory deeds over time. So while being generous does not *directly* determine whether someone behaves in a supererogatory manner in any given situation, it is likely to increase the overall number of supererogatory deeds performed. For this reason, a person's character is extremely important and thus relevant to discussions of supererogation in Protestant ethics.

In a very important article on supererogation, Gregory Trianosky spends considerable time distinguishing character and motives. As discussed in detail in chapter one, one of his main goals is to show—contrary to Susan Hale—that a person may still feel the need to provide an excuse for not performing an act of supererogation. Hale's position is that if the act is not obligatory, then a person should feel no need to explain its nonperformance. So, if a person feels the need to explain why they did not perform an act, then this is evidence that the act is not optional, but obligatory.¹⁹² In disputing this claim, Trianosky draws a distinction between negative deontic judgements and negative aretaic judgements. The former are concerned with the “wrongness of some particular act” while the latter is concerned with the “viciousness of some conative or affective state of the agent's.”¹⁹³ After making these two distinctions, Trianosky makes a further division into two types of negative aretaic judgements: “standing traits or dispositions” and “occurrent motives.”¹⁹⁴ After making this distinction, he takes the position that while the omission of a supererogatory

¹⁹² Hale, “Against Supererogation,” 276.

¹⁹³ Trianosky, “Supererogation, Wrongdoing, and Vice,” 28–29.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

act cannot warrant a negative deontic judgement, it may call for a negative aretaic judgement. However, Trianosky clarifies this position, adding that a negative aretaic judgement for not performing a supererogatory act has more to do with a flaw in the agent's "motivational structure on some particular occasion" rather with a "general flaw in the agent's moral *character*."¹⁹⁵ In support of this claim, Trianosky rightly points to the fact that a vicious motive on a given occasion does not necessarily entail a corresponding vicious trait. He writes: "One may act insensitively on a given occasion (when under great stress, for example) and yet be acting entirely out of character."¹⁹⁶ His overall point is the same as mine: permanent traits or dispositions are not relevant when assessing the deontic status of a particular act.

Just as importantly, Trianosky proceeds to argue that a purely "deontic characterization of supererogatory action . . . provides no such connection with the judgements of a person," and that for this reason, is "incomplete."¹⁹⁷ Granted, it is not clear whether Trianosky is saying if motives have deontic status. However, this interpretation cannot be ruled out even though his larger aim is to show that there is a strong relationship between supererogation and virtue.¹⁹⁸ Trianosky's assertion that a purely deontic theory of supererogation is incomplete is similar to Montague's rejection of "act supererogationism." In "act supererogationism," an act is supererogatory if it is "identifiable with being morally valuable but neither required nor prohibited." This is an objectivist view because, in a sense, the status resides completely "in" the act. No reference to the psychology of the agent at the time of the act is considered. Labeling this as the "orthodox view" and ultimately identifying it with Urmson, Montague goes on to reject this view in favor of "agent supererogationism." Agent supererogationism requires not only that the act be morally valuable and neither obligatory nor forbidden, but also that the act be performed in a

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 29.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 29.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 30–31.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 31; See Mellema, *Beyond the Call*, 132–140.

praiseworthy manner by the agent.¹⁹⁹ For Montague, this a clear reference to “the motives with which [an act] is performed.”²⁰⁰

Before concluding this chapter, I want to show how my view is related to the three pro-motive accounts that Zly presents: *weak-motivism*, *strong-motivism*, and *partial-motivism*. Of the three different forms that Sverdlik’s *Motives Matter* position can take, I envision a Protestant account of supererogation to be a combination of weak-motivism and partial-motivism but not strong motivism. According to Zly, weak-motivism is the view that “a change in motive alone is sometimes sufficient to move an act from one deontic category into another.”²⁰¹ I would prefer to reword this as: “Weak-motivism is the view that motives can and often do affect the deontic classification of an act.” The strength of this view for Protestant ethics is twofold: (1) motives are said to have deontic relevance, and (2) the door is left open to the possibility that there might be specific occasions when motives might not have deontic relevance. Granted, I think this latter situation will be rare, but it is nonetheless important to allow for the possibility.

I am not comfortable labeling Protestant ethics as strong-motivism because it goes too far. Claiming that “a good motive always serves to make an act right, whereas a bad (or insufficiently good) motive always makes it wrong”²⁰² misses the mark in one way in particular: *it does not take into account the possibility that someone might be culpable for making a poor moral judgement*. For example, imagine a scenario where Richard is wanting to give an additional £100 to a local charity to which he and his partner have already promised £100. However, due to poor planning, a failure to communicate with his significant other who balances the budget, and an overall unwillingness to pause and do a bit of number-crunching, the additional gift of £100 (£200 total) results in overdraft charges that month. When the charges are totalled, it resulted in fines totaling over £150. In an effort to pay

¹⁹⁹ Montague, “Acts, Agents, and Supererogation,” 105.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

²⁰¹ Zly, 407.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 407.

the fines and replenish the extra £100 so that there is enough in the account to live on next month, the couple decide not to give any money to the local charity for the next two months. The point is that although Richard's motive could have been morally praiseworthy when giving the additional £100 to a local charity, it could very well be the case that his refusal to pause, communicate with his partner who balances the budget, and think through the personal and familial ramifications of such an act results in the act no longer being considered supererogatory. He simply did not take the time to consider all of the relevant factors and as a result, made a poor moral judgement even though his motive was good. Though I do not pretend that this is flawless example, it suffices to show that proper motive *might* not be enough in some circumstances for an act to fulfill an obligation or to count as supererogatory. After all, Richard is to some degree culpable for the ignorance from which he gave. One could easily argue that because Richard does not obtain the necessary information about the likely consequences of the act, his deed is not meritorious because it actually hurt more than helped.

“Partial-motivism” is the view that “a good motive is necessary but not sufficient for right action.”²⁰³ The argument that I have set forth in this chapter aligns well with the first part of the definition: “a good motive is necessary” for an act to be classified as supererogatory in Protestant ethics. However, because there could be instances when a good motive *is* sufficient (assuming that the corresponding act is performed) for an act to be morally right or supererogatory, I do not embrace the second part of the definition for partial-motivism (i.e., that a good motive is not sufficient). Having previously stated why weak-motivism is in harmony with my view, I envision a motive-based account of supererogation in Protestant ethics that is a hybrid of weak-motivism and partial-motivism. It might look something like this: *A good motive is necessary for an act to be classified as supererogatory in Protestant ethics* (i.e., partial motivism) *because motives can and often do affect the deontic status of an act* (i.e., weak-motivism). Admittedly, this last italicized statement

²⁰³ Ibid., 407.

is somewhat repetitive, because to say that a good motive is necessary is to already admit that motives have deontic relevance. However, it is important to be as thorough as possible and leave no doubt when making a new proposal.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that motives have deontic relevance in Protestant ethics. Leaning heavily on Helmut Thielicke's motive-centric account of Protestant ethics, I argued that a person cannot perform an act of supererogation in Protestant ethics without proper motive. It seems unthinkable that God would consider a person to have fulfilled their duty if they gave, prayed, fasted, preached, or chose to reconcile with a guilty spouse from a selfish motive. At different points in this chapter, I address each of these acts in relation to motive, including an entire section (i.e., section four) devoted to the last act due to its place of prominence in my thesis. I then worked with the following presupposition: *if obligatory acts named in the New Testament require proper motive, then surely this is also true of supererogatory acts.*

The view that I have defended stands in opposition to three other views: (1) acts of supererogation are not possible; (2) an objectivist account of supererogation that does not include any reference to the internal world of the agent (i.e., character, intentions, motives); and more specifically, (3) any type of intent-based theory that rejects the deontic relevance of motives. Concerning the last view, I spent a considerable amount of time showing why there is room to doubt Heyd's altruistic-intent requirement (AIR) and Archer's moral-intent requirement (MIR). Ultimately, they rely on Mill's anti-motivist stance which is too strong. Besides, the larger issue with Mill's view, and with Heyd's and Archer's related views is that their intent-requirement theories require a commitment to utilitarian principles. Simple logic suggests that if one rejects a utilitarian perspective, then any conclusions derived from that presupposed foundation—for example, that intentions, not motives, possess deontic relevance—disappear. This opened the door for my argument that

from a biblical perspective, right motive is a necessary condition if any act is to be classified as supererogatory in Protestant ethics.

Conclusion

The main purpose of my thesis has been to demonstrate the possibility, internal structure, and role of supererogatory acts in Protestant Christian ethics. The concept has been wrongly rejected for far too long by Protestant thinkers. As far back as the Reformers, the concept was rejected in order to preserve a doctrine of justification that did not depend upon works in any way. Following Mellema's lead, I have argued there is at least one supererogatory deed in the New Testament—an innocent spouse reconciling with an adulterous spouse—that, while being supererogatory, does not “[justify] a person in God’s eyes.”¹ Like Melancthon’s endorsement of the counsel of celibacy, it is an act that possesses moral worth, is neither obligatory nor forbidden, and lastly, does not challenge the Protestant position that “a person can never be judged righteous in God’s eyes on the basis of works alone.”

I argued in chapter four that the additional criterion of proper motive is also required for an act to be classified as supererogatory in Protestant ethics. Toward the end of chapter four, I reexamined the innocent spouse’s act of reconciling with a spouse who has committed adultery, in light of my argument that an act must be performed with proper motive in order to qualify for supererogatory status. Chapter four concluded with an important but often overlooked topic: the indirect relevance of character to supererogation. This last topic is very important for two reasons: (1) it recognizes that the character of a person can, in the long-term, impact whether supererogatory acts are performed while admitting that character never has a role in determining the deontic status of a particular act at any given time, and (2) the value of character and the development of virtues is affirmed in relation to supererogation, a subject that is overwhelmingly deontic in nature for obvious reasons. This reaffirms my stance that Protestant ethics can embrace the possibility and role of supererogation without having to be considered purely

¹ Mellema, *Beyond the Call*, 52.

deontological. Importantly, this perspective allows for acts of supererogation in Protestant ethics, while not forcing one to unnecessarily reject other elements which are also important for “the explication of the Christian life” such as “narrative, character, the virtues, and tradition.”²

Assuming my argument is successful and that acts of supererogation are possible in Protestant ethics, as Gregory Mellema and John and Paul Feinberg concur, what is the value of this affirmation? First of all, it is important in Protestant ethics. In addition, the concept of supererogation—as I stated in the Introduction of the thesis—might also prove helpful in counseling, biblical interpretation, and homiletics. I want to take each in turn.

Affirming the possibility of supererogation in Protestant ethics is important for several reasons. First, affirming supererogation creates a common ground upon which both Protestants and Roman Catholics can stand and converse. Granted, there will still be significant differences between how acts of supererogation are viewed in relation to justification, but this point aside, the affirmation has the potential to initiate a more fruitful discourse about the nature of such acts, which will hopefully foster better understanding of the other’s view as well as an increased level of respect. Secondly, affirming supererogation in Protestant ethics opens the door for greater engagement with moral philosophers who are writing about supererogation. Protestant theologians and ethicists can benefit richly from some of the ideas that have been discussed in great detail in moral philosophy (e.g., the distinction between intent and motive, the concept of the good-ought tie-up, etc.) as they seek to better understand and articulate both the Bible and our moral responsibilities. Thirdly, affirming supererogatory acts prevents Protestant ethics from becoming what Meilaender calls a “tyrannical” normative theory, which refers to any ethical theory that does not permit a person to forego the performance of a good deed when it is in their power to do so. Supererogation entails that a person does not have to perform a good deed every time an opportunity presents. The importance of this cannot be overstated. For

² Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), xvii.

example, if a person must perform a good deed every time there is an opportunity, then what place remains for interests such as “reading . . . , playing the oboe, or improving [one’s] backhand?”³ After listing these three activities, Susan Wolf goes on to argue that human life would be “strangely barren” if these types of interests were forbidden due the excessive moral demand that is characteristic of “tyrannical” normative theories.⁴ Ultimately, Meilaender argues that a “tyrannical” normative theory prevents a person from accepting themselves as a human being with limitations.⁵ Therefore, the affirmation of supererogation can be viewed as a safeguard which protects Protestant ethics from becoming “tyrannical,” making room for creativity and personal projects that might otherwise be forbidden. A richer, more beautiful conception of God, human beings, and life in general result from affirming the possibility of supererogation in Protestant ethics.

Another way that affirming supererogation in Protestant ethics can be helpful is in counseling contexts. The act that I argued is supererogatory in chapter three pertains to marriage, adultery, divorce, forgiveness, and marital reconciliation, all of which are surely some of the most common issues for which people seek pastoral and professional help. For example, divorce rates in the United States for adults 50 and older have doubled since 1990 and have tripled for adults 65 and older.⁶ Even with these increases, the divorce rate for adults under 50 in the United States is still twice as high as for the former group. There can be little doubt that some of these divorces are because of adultery. Issues like adultery, reconciliation, and divorce are continuing, and I

³ Susan Wolf, *The Variety of Values: Essays on Morality, Meaning, and Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 13.

⁴ Though Wolf’s comments are helpful, it is worth mentioning that she is actually arguing that a moral saint—which she defines as “a person whose every action is as morally good as possible . . . [and] who is as morally worthy as can be”—is both an “unattractive” person and ideal. See Wolf, *The Variety of Values*, 11–12. Robert Adams argues against Wolf’s position, claiming that her argument fails because her conception of a moral saint as someone that lacks individuality and cannot enjoy the good in life is inaccurate. See Robert Adams, “Saints,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 81, no. 7 (1984): 392–393, 396.

⁵ Meilaender, *Faith and Faithfulness*, 99, 108.

⁶ Renee Stepler, “Led by Baby Boomers, divorce rates climb for America’s 50+ population,” Pew Research Center, accessed February 7th, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/09/led-by-baby-boomers-divorce-rates-climb-for-americas-50-population/>.

believe that supererogation can provide valuable clarity in relation to Jesus' teaching on divorce for an innocent spouse who is suffering. In this sense, the term can be a *means of grace* because it can help to eliminate moral confusion for a person who is considering their moral options and desiring to be faithful to Jesus Christ. The bottom line is that supererogation can provide valuable clarity in situations like the one described, which can ultimately help innocent victims.

Another area where the concept of supererogation can be useful is in interpreting various biblical passages. As I stated at the end of chapter two, I believe it is a great advantage to any Protestant account of supererogation if concrete examples of supererogation can be shown to exist in the New Testament. This is by no means a criticism of Mellema's vocation-based proposal nor of the three examples that the Feinbergs provide. Mellema's creative proposal, which centers around the Protestant idea of vocation, is an ingenious attempt to bring theistic supererogationists and anti-supererogationists together. Regarding the Feinbergs' three examples, they are to be commended for their courage to not only affirm what so many Protestants have rejected, but also for listing three specific acts. However, one is still left with the question: *Since many Protestants like myself believe that ultimate authority belongs to Scripture alone, can acts of supererogation find support in the New Testament itself?*⁷ By way of example, I argued in chapter three that they can. However, it would admittedly be disappointing if an innocent spouse reconciling with an adulterous spouse were the only act. However, I do not believe it is. There is ample opportunity to explore other Bible passages with an eye toward supererogation. And more important than merely looking for such acts in the New Testament—for that in itself would be nothing more than an academic version of *Where's Wally*—is the potential

⁷ I have in mind the following statement by Michael Horton: "The churches of the Reformation do not deny the ongoing authority of the church in its representative assemblies, but the key difference is this: whereas the Roman Catholic Church combines Scripture and tradition as one source of magisterial (i.e., ruling) authority, we confess that this belongs to Scripture alone, with tradition as ministerial (i.e., serving). See Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*, 67-68.

utility of the concept of supererogation for making sense of what is there. I have two passages in mind, the first of which I will discuss briefly: The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16) and where Paul discusses the mutual act of abstaining from sex for a determined amount of time in the context of marriage in order to devote oneself more fully to prayer (1 Corinthians 7:5–6). The latter is valuable because while Protestants may reject the idea that celibacy is supererogatory, as discussed close to the start of chapter three, the more “restricted act” of “abstain[ing] from sensual pleasure for a fixed time so as to give himself up to prayer,” might count as supererogatory.⁸ The reason for this is straightforward: while married Christians are commanded to pray (as are all Christians), they can do so without having to abstain from sex in marriage. Thus, abstaining from sex in order to more fully devote oneself to prayer appears to go above and beyond what is technically required. It would be an act that is neither obligatory (Paul himself writes that it is a “concession,” not a “command”), nor forbidden, possesses moral worth, and would therefore qualify for supererogatory status so long as it is performed with proper motive. If I am correct, this would be of immense value because it would represent a point of agreement between Roman Catholics and Protestants which should always be welcome in the spirit of ecumenism.

In the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, a landowner pays out more than he is obligated to pay to the group of laborers that only worked one hour. This act bears the marks of a supererogatory deed. In the story, the landowner went out early in the morning to hire people to come and work in his vineyard. He and the first group of laborers agreed that their pay would be one denarius, which was the typical day’s wage in Jesus’ day. The landowner then went out again at nine in the morning, noon, three in the afternoon, and

⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 108, a. 5, resp., 63; Granted, Aquinas means something much broader than abstaining from sex in marriage for a fixed time when he writes: “abstaining from sensual pleasure.” However, there is no reason to think that the former is not subsumed in the latter. Concerning this act, David Heyd confirms that for Aquinas, the more restricted version of celibacy (which can occur in marriage) is an act of supererogation (he even uses the term, “supererogation” rather than “counsels” reaffirming once more how interchangeable the terms are). See Heyd, *Supererogation*, 22.

one last time at five in the afternoon to hire additional laborers. Only the first group hired knew what they were to be paid. To the group that started working at nine, and presumably to all the others, the landowner simply said: "I will pay you whatever is right."⁹ When the workday was over, the landowner told the manager to gather the workers and pay them in reverse order from when they started. Thus, the laborers who only worked one hour were paid first. The manager gave each laborer that had worked only one hour a full day's wage (i.e., a denarius), the same amount that had been promised to the first group that was hired early in the morning. The first group initially did not have a problem with this, believing that they would in turn receive more. To their surprise, they received a single denarius just as the laborers that had only worked one hour. At this they "grumbled," saying: "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat."¹⁰ When the landowner heard their complaints, he replied: "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last."¹¹ With the first group of laborers, the landowner was obligated to pay them a denarius because that was what both parties agreed upon. Thus, when the manager gave each a denarius, the obligation was fulfilled and the duty discharged.

Now if a denarius was fair pay (which the passage seems to imply) for someone who had worked a full day and the landowner had not specified a certain amount of pay for the laborers hired at five in the afternoon, then it is safe to conclude that he was not obligated to pay a full day's wage to those that had worked only one hour. The first group had presumably worked twelve hours, because the Jewish workday was from six in the morning to six in the evening. If there had been a way to "make change," then paying the one-hour

⁹ Matt. 20:4.

¹⁰ Matt. 20:12.

¹¹ Matt. 20:13–16.

laborers 1/12 of a denarius would have been morally acceptable because they had only worked 1/12 of the amount that the laborers hired early in the morning had worked. Because 1/12 of a denarius would have been morally permissible, anything more appears to be “above and beyond” what might be considered obligatory because it pays out more than is due. If I am right, then the landowner’s act is a great example of supererogation in the New Testament because it not only possesses moral worth (i.e., it embodies and expresses generosity), but is neither obligatory nor forbidden. Granted, the act must be performed with proper motive, so if the landowner acted with the motive to anger the all-day laborers, then the act is not supererogatory. However, the Bible tells us that the landowner acted from a generous motive, and thus the fourth motive-criterion is satisfied.

Although I do not pretend that this is a conclusive argument for the landowner’s act being supererogatory, I do believe that the act is a strong candidate for supererogation. One reason why this is important is that the concept of supererogation directs our focus from the group of laborers claiming that the landowner’s act is unfair to the overlooked, marginalized group that seems to have wanted to work a full day but were not hired. Their working only one hour was due to no fault of their own, and in the end, grace, not merit, prevailed; they were blessed out of the generosity of the landowner, not paid based on merit. Ultimately, they were not given what they deserved. More than anything, the landowner’s act reflects the generous character of God—the giver of “every perfect gift”¹²—as well as the beauty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, a gospel that is extended to those who “thirst” but “have no money,” a gospel of heavenly “wine and milk” that can be purchased “without money and without price.”¹³ Ultimately, the concept of supererogation helps to redirect our focus so that the landowner’s act can be appreciated for what it is—a very generous act performed for the benefit of unfortunate individuals who felt overlooked, possibly judged or scorned, or even marginalized as evidenced by

¹² James 1:17.

¹³ Isa. 55:1.

their response: “no one has hired us.”¹⁴ Apart from the concept of supererogation, one might be tempted to belittle the landowner’s actions and focus solely on the fact that it seems he should have paid the all-day laborers more than what was initially agreed. However, looking at this passage through the lens of supererogation shifts our focus from the apparent unfairness of the situation to the abundant generosity of the landowner. The real focus of this passage is the generosity of the landowner, and the concept of supererogation helps appreciate this feature. Granted, one can arrive at this conclusion apart from the concept of supererogation, but I suggest that being more aware of the concept while reading the Bible and interacting in the world can greatly enrich our interpretations and experience. Whether the application of supererogation in this passage ultimately inspires one to greater worship of God for his generosity which is on display in symbolic form (i.e., the landowner’s act) or whether a small business owner is challenged to rethink what they pay their employees, the concept can be of value.

Furthermore, the concept of supererogation can be of homiletic value. If the concept can enrich our reading and interpretation of various passages in the New Testament, then it stands to reason that the preaching of those passages will be improved as a direct consequence. However, the concept of supererogation can also be useful in another way as it relates to homiletics. Imagine a priest or preacher wanting to make the case that the Gospel of Jesus Christ obligates relatively affluent Christians to give charity to alleviate world hunger on a consistent basis. It could be the case that the priest or preacher is teaching in a socio-cultural and ecclesial context where such acts are deemed absolutely optional. In order to make the point, the concept of supererogation would be most helpful even if the act in question is *not* supererogatory. For example, the preacher may frame the talk by using the concept of supererogation to communicate that it is often the case that people, as well as Christians, believe that we have no moral obligation to act in an area where one might in fact exist. In making the point, they will use the concept to

¹⁴ Matt. 20:7.

explain that Christians are neglecting a specific moral obligation due to an erroneous belief that the act is supererogatory rather than obligatory. Of course, the distinction between a perfect duty and imperfect duty will need to be made, but this is not my present focus. Many Christians no doubt view the act of giving to charity to prevent the death of someone on the other side of the world as supererogatory. By using the concept, the priest or preacher will have a single term that allows them to more efficiently communicate in an effort to convince their congregants that the act in question is not supererogatory though it is treated as such. This results in the off-beat proposal that the concept of supererogation can possess functional value even when an act of supererogation is not possible. One might even take this to an extreme to argue that if there are no acts of supererogation in Protestant ethics, the term and concept can still be of great benefit in homiletics and the other contexts previously mentioned.

Ultimately, acts of supererogation are possible in Protestant ethics. Furthermore, the concept of supererogation has an important and enriching role to play in Protestant ethics, counseling sessions with people who are hurting, in understanding various New Testament passages, and in the teaching and preaching of the Gospel. The time has come for Protestants to wholeheartedly embrace supererogation as a *means of grace* that can aid individual Christians, lay leaders, counselors, priests and preachers, and the church at large that desires to be faithful to Jesus Christ.

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